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MARGARET'S MEAD

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MARGARET'S MEAD

Margaret's Mead

By

Jane Harding

Garden City, N. Y., and Toronto
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First Edition

TO

THE DEAR COMPANION OF ALL MY DAYS
— TRUEST COMRADE, SWEETEST FRIEND —

MY SISTER

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SUMMER

MARGARET'S MEAD

ARRIVAL

I

AS THE train slowed in to the little country station Marion drew a long breath of relief. The corner seats were occupied by clamorous children but she looked between and past their bobbing heads for a familiar face on the platform.

She caught a slight, graceful figure in well-made tweeds with a keen, expectant eye on the carriages. Her heart contracted to a queer thrill of mingled pain, affection, and pride.

"Lottie!" she murmured to herself, and stepped eagerly out of the train. Lottie saw her on the instant, turned to her with gray-green eyes—by courtesy called hazel—a-dance with excitement and the swift colour glancing in her thin clear cheeks like flame.

"Of course I came for you. Did you expect to find me in bed? Bill is an old worrier! Yes, I always call him Bill now because he hates it so." She turned to a porter: "Could you take out the case, Mr. Gray? Mr. Napier can't leave the horse. The trunk can come out by milk cart. Oh,

thank you." She swept her sister off the platform and out to the dog-cart, gaily conscious of curious glances following them, almost before Marion had time to smile at the ramblers, crimson and pink, climbing the low stone wall.

"Why 'Mr. Gray'?" Marion whispered over her brother-in-law's shoulder as the small dress case was stowed away in front. "He used to be 'Old John' I think, when I was small."

"Why not 'Mr. Gray'," answered Lottie. "Hasn't he a right to his name? We're all democrats to-day." She broke off with her "take-you-into-my-confidence" laugh. "He'll do any mortal thing for me. And then I haven't to wait. This station last winter was the coldest place made."

Her husband caught part of the sentence. "Who's the latest victim?" asked he.

Again Lottie laughed, joyous and mischievous. "I'll tell you when we get home," she said. But downright Marion answered for her: "Old John."

"This mare travels," remarked Lottie. "Don't you like driving, Marion? Isn't the sunshine lovely? Aren't you hungry? Don't you long to see Margaret's Mead?"

"To see my babies, she means," interpolated her husband. Marion could have slain him for the rich, self-satisfied indulgence of his tone. She thought: "Shall I ever like Lottie's men?" and hated herself for implied disloyalty. Aloud she said, and strove to say gaily:

"I'm longing to see both; the babies may be taken for granted. Yes, I'm longing to see Margaret's Mead."

"When you ran about it as a kiddie you didn't think you'd live to see Lottie there with me for her husband," her brother-in-law challenged, still with rich self-satisfaction.

Marion answered, diplomatically:

"I remember you kissing her."

He laughed with real enjoyment.

"I can see Marion now, can't you, Lottie," he said, "stamping her foot, and me hidden behind the door, and saying: 'I hate those low Napiers!' "

Marion saw pitfalls among these memories; she added, with a sober face:

"Especially Will! And so I cried in his arms one Christmas Eve."

"Three years ago," said Lottie's husband, and turned fond eyes on his wife. "Nice things you've brought about for some of us. We shall never forget it, shall we, Marion?"

"I never shall," said Marion.

"And fancy," said Lottie, with undisturbed equanimity, "that makes Clare nearly four years old. Four next Christmas Eve! Wasn't she a sweet mite, Marion?"

"I hated the sight of her that day," replied Marion, with vigour, and Will joined her, giving his mare a flick:

"Ay, Marion, so did I."

Lottie laughed gladly. "Duffers, both of you," she said; "I take a lot of killing."

She sat rigid suddenly as the mare reared under her husband's hand.

"What are you doing, Bill," she cried. "Jess never wants the whip."

He smiled apologetically as he laid a reassuring hand on hers. But his lips were unsteady, and Marion's eyes swam in tears.

It hardly needed a second glance at Lottie's face to tell even a casual observer that she fought a deadlier foe than any birth-time pangs. A bright flush waxed and waned in her clear-skinned, sunken cheeks; her temples were ominously hollowed, eyes as ominously large and bright. The long, slender fingers that had been her husband's pride were painful to him now in their growing attenuation. Marion, freshly noting each warning symptom, called up all her resources to maintain a surface demeanour of happy calm.

Lottie kept her busily occupied with the loved features of a familiar landscape. Her "Do you remember?" greeted each turn of the road with its hedgerows fragrant of honeysuckle and beautiful with stir of leaf; with its broad-expansive views for ever fashioning into new scenes of beauty—downside and woodland, homestead and cot; now with the clinging appeal of the near and homely; now striking the wide ranging note of spaciousness and distance, far hill and dreaming trees.

There was the white-railed bridge over the trout stream, where the postman was awaited of old; there the cottage shop where bulls' eyes turned to candy and acid drops gained a curious flavour of

mould; there the churchyard with its leaning gravestones, here the dairyman's cottage and paddock gate. And now at last Marion drew a deep breath of emotion as her sister suddenly grasped her hand.

"Now, Marion! Margaret's Mead!"

II

The long, low house lay dreaming against its background of trees. Up from the mellow tiles rose its queer red chimney stacks; over its wide latticed casements protruded tiled and gabled eaves. Its red bricks were mellow of time and rich in contrast with timbered lines and encroachments of creeper and climbing roses and jessamine upon its walls. The garden was ablaze with the red and white of stately hollyhocks, the blue of lupins, flaming red-hot pokers, and Aaron's rod. All this glimpsed in the distance as a brilliant blurred foreground of colour, where the true significance of the picture lay in pointed gables and quaint chimney stacks and blue smoke curling thin against the dreaming trees.

At the back of Marion's mind as she looked was the consciousness of a deep voice uttering words whose meaning failed to reach her until they recurred to her in a spell of wide wakefulness in the quiet night. Now they were mere sound at which she vaguely smiled. Actually Lottie's husband was saying:

"You two amuse me. You say Margaret's Mead and think of the house; whereas Margaret's

Mead is really the east pasture which the whole farm's now named after. 'Margaret's Mead' can't be a house, 'tisn't reason."

"Name of the farm now, Bill," Lottie responded, absently. Her glance was with Marion's, seeking new aspects of the house at each curve of the winding road.

They turned into the lane that passed the courtyard on which the kitchen door opened, and that ended with the carter's cottage.

"I'm taking you in by the back door, dear," said Lottie. "You won't mind? I want you to see the garden first from the front porch."

Marion smiled as she jumped to the ground and followed her sister through the bricked courtyard to the open kitchen door; she was aware of a man—the carter probably—arriving opportunely and leading the mare off to the stables, and of Will shouting instructions after him. Then as they crossed the threshold he was upon their heels and before she could take in any other impression of the interior he had crossed the kitchen to the hall and taken down a gun from the exact place her uncle's had occupied of old.

"I'll have an hour's shooting—you'll be glad to have a talk," he said to Lottie; and at the door called back: "Just an hour."

Lottie began a running commentary, half of which Marion did not hear. She saw that a dapper servant, neat in cap and strings, had risen at their entrance from where fat Meg used to sit. All signs of the house chaps—dairy chap and odd man

—had vanished from the big kitchen, and the open fire of peat was replaced by a kitchen range.

"We had a new one," Lottie was saying. "Mrs. Napier had the huge thing that used to be in the dining room installed there. My dear! It burnt half a ton a day! So I had it taken out and this one put in; we can stay in the kitchen with comfort now, can't we, Kate?"

They passed on to the dining room. "Only peep in," said Lottie, "I know you're dying for a wash and something to eat. Better, isn't it? But I don't like the grate; Mrs. Napier's taste! Now just the garden."

They stood in the porch. Marion looked out down the grass path between the herbaceous borders; at the smiling lawns; at the loaded apple trees. Suddenly she turned to Lottie; her eyes were wet. Lottie's lips quivered; she put her arms out and took her sister into a fond embrace.

"My home, your home," she said, brokenly. "Dear, the bad time is over. It's over! But I have such a lot that I must tell you!"

She kept her arm round Marion's waist as they went upstairs.

III

The tour of the house was completed later, in the fading light of the July day. It was hurried by Marion, who saw that Lottie was now thoroughly fatigued. She held out insistently, however, vowing that she was not tired, and the longest pause was made in the nursery, where four-year-old Clare

lay with tumbled dark hair, like Lottie's, and the eighteen-month boy showed a head covered with fine bright curls, only a few shades brighter and lighter than Marion's gold-brown hair.

"Bobbie is a true Harland," Lottie said, caressingly untwining a silken curl. "I took after mother's family. He would do for your son, Marion."

Marion shook her head.

"There is more than a touch of Will and you," she said, "though he's got my hair. He's sweetly pretty, Lottie, but my nose never spread over my face like that. Nor did yours. Thank your father for a Napier nose, my little man," she adjured the sleeping child.

"If you married his uncle your son might do the same," retorted Lottie. "Walter's not engaged, you know, Marion, and Margaret's Mead is his."

"Thank you," said Marion. "Obliged, I'm sure. But I don't want your leavings, Lottie. Walter wanted you when you were a child of twelve."

"And hasn't wanted me since," laughed Lottie. Marion, who knew her sister through and through, caught in a moment the note of conscious triumph and the light and flush dancing to eyes and cheeks. She said, in another tone:

"When you are resting tell me exactly how things stand here."

"I want to," said Lottie, and smiled perversely. "You were asking me just now about the men's quarters, since we no longer have them living in,

and what the cheese room and dairy were used for now the milk is sold. There are easily two houses under this roof, Marion. Marry Walter and I'll move into the empty rooms."

"Do they stand empty?" asked Marion, ignoring the rest.

"As good as empty; most of them actually so. I've often planned it. The back staircase could easily be——"

"No good, Lottie." Marion moved toward the door. "You know I couldn't stand Walter any more than he could stand me. You know it's all nonsense. What you said in your letter nearly kept me away."

Lottie laughed. "We'll see," she said. "Let's run through the empty rooms and then I'll lie down as you want me to."

As they glanced through the rooms, each light and fresh with latticed casement windows wide to the summer air, and tapped upon by wandering tendrils of creeper or rambler or jessamine, Marion wondered whether Lottie was subtly counting upon the insidious appeal of the country house and country life to forward her desires. She soon dismissed the idle speculation; Lottie's subtlety lay in other directions; but her own pause upon the doubt showed her the danger as real. Then she pushed thought of herself aside with derision, and bent her whole mind to looking after her sister.

So at last she sat beside Lottie's couch in the long, wide, oak-panelled room that ran along one end of the house of Margaret's Mead from south to north,

with a third wide window opening to the west. In the faint dusk she was aware of little more than the bloom and fragrance of flowers in their bowls, and the soft sway of silken curtains stirred by the breeze.

"This room is so cool," Lottie had urged, when Marion had tried to persuade her to go straight to bed. "And the nights are so long. If I stay up I will eat a supper."

She was eating it now, Marion saw to that; her prescribed supper of fruit and junket and cream. "I used to be so fond of cream," Lottie deplored, "now I have to worry and scheme to find ways of taking it without loathing it. But it does me good. I'm really getting stronger. If only I could get rid of temperatures."

Marion assented cheerfully and rejoiced to see the look of intense exhaustion leaving her sister's face. She had drawn her chair to Lottie's feet and sat in the dusk listening to her voice after her thin face had become no more than a white oval glimmering through the gloom.

IV

"Where do you want me to begin?" Lottie had asked. "I wrote you all about the bankruptcy; everything was sold, except just my wedding presents—oh, yes, and Clare's pram and cradle. There's a clause, I understand, that spares the baby's things."

"What did you do then?" said Marion.

"We took rooms on the proceeds of the wedding

presents, and Will had got a job—a sort of commission agency some of his betting friends had got for him." Lottie paused. "It was no good," she concluded, "but it kept us floating, with the presents, for some weeks."

"And then——"

"Oh, then—then he got other jobs—or didn't. And I took in needlework. I saved my sewing machine; I had it before we married, you see. But of course I wasn't strong; and there was Clare; and the treadle seemed heavy . . . so in the end Bill did the machining for me."

"Will?" Marion stared at her sister with a sort of tense surprise.

"Oh, he did all sorts of things. I had pleurisy and he did the cooking, and looked after baby, and went down and made me poultices in the night. He was a capital nurse. Marion"—she was holding one of Marion's firm, strong hands; now her hot, feverish one squeezed it spasmodically—"I learnt to love old Bill as I never thought I could love any man."

Marion stirred restlessly. "Ah," she said, "if only——"

Lottie dropped her hand and groped suddenly for her handkerchief. Marion knew at once that she was crying—the swift, blinding, passionate tears of anger for a beloved one misunderstood. She said:

"Don't, dear. Oh, don't. I do understand. He had made up to you—more than made up. I see you feel that."

"I never loved him enough," Lottie jerked out, between quick hard breaths and sobs. "We were equally to blame. You don't know; you're not married. In the first year of married life you're silly, and hard. People talk about the first gilt of marriage—it's all nonsense. The gilt only begins to come if your love survives the first year."

Marion longed to say, concisely: "Will drank and gambled a little before his marriage, more the year after, and more the year after that. There was the secret of his ruin." But she wisely held her tongue. How wisely, Lottie's next words told her.

"You'll say Will had begun to go wrong before we married. Of course he had. You don't suppose I was bad enough to drive him to it if he hadn't? But marriage at that time was the worst possible thing for him; for us both! We were so critical, so hard, so ignorant. He was to be the perfect husband, and he wasn't, and I the perfect wife——" She broke off, put down her handkerchief and raised herself on her cushions. It was yet light enough for Marion to guess at her characteristic smile. "I've no use for perfection myself," she concluded; "never had. No, we won't have lights, dear, in case the men come in. My nose is like a lobster. And what *is* the good of dwelling on these old unhappy times?"

"Tell me what changed them, instead," suggested Marion. She knew that her sister would carry a lighter heart the more she talked now.

Lottie reflected. "They weren't altogether unhappy," she said, musingly. "We were so near to

one another; the nearest-together people in the world, I think. Nobody else cared . . . I'm sorry, Mary; I didn't mean to hurt. You see you didn't know; I wouldn't have told you for worlds!"

"I began to fear," said Marion. "Why didn't you tell me, Lottie?"

Lottie gave a little laugh. "Before I was married I was always quick enough to come a-borrowing! Ah, Marion, but this is different. We were two against the world. Will would have hated it. You never knew. I could tell you . . . one day, just at the end, after Will had become changed and religious, really in earnest——"

Marion interrupted: "That lasts?" she asked.

"Oh, for ever, I think. And it was so queer, the very thing you and I used to think so unspeakable!" She paused and laughed on a light note. "You remember, Marion, like the Napiers, so low! It was an open-air meeting; what we used to call a 'street corner conversion'. But, after all, the Napiers are like that."

"Lottie!" exclaimed Marion.

"Ah," said Lottie, laughing again, "I may say it. I'm one of the family. But it's too big a risk for others. What was I telling you?"

"About the end of the bad time, after Will had changed."

"I remember. About the sixpence, just before the end; our worst bit of bad luck. It was a pouring wet day and Bill had been out in it all the time looking for a job. He didn't get one, not so much

as a bag to carry or a horse to hold. At last he struck into the country in sheer despair to walk himself warm. And as luck would have it a couple of horsemen, stragglers from the hunt, were coming across a field and making for a gate at the roadside. He was able to reach it first and get it open and one of them threw him a coin. He hadn't a doubt it was sixpence, but it fell in the mud and it was getting dark. He searched—wet through as he was—until it was too dark to see at all, but he never found it. He knew I was at home, expecting him, and there wasn't even bread in the house, nor a fire, nor anything of our own left to sell. And he leant over the gate and cried like a child."

Marion said, in a strangled voice of pain: "You ought to have told me. It would have been so easy to send you each week bare necessities."

Lottie answered: "Tea and bread and butter and cheese, for instance." Marion herself did a hasty mental calculation—the year was 1913—that ran something like—"Quarter pound of tea, 6d; half pound butter, 8d; cheese say 8d; and postage and a shilling postal order—three shillings." Then she heard Lottie saying:

"Out of six and ninepence a week, my dear—your full salary at that time. I could never manage on eight shillings, but then I always had the luck to get cribs where the food was bad."

"I saved four pounds that year," remarked Marion.

"Out of £15 and a shilling a week for laundry! I don't know how you did it. At any rate, I wasn't

going to sponge on you when I had a husband to fight for me. Perhaps I should have done, who knows? But that night, when I had comforted my poor broken-hearted Will, I let him write a letter to Walter."

"He had wanted to before?"

"Oh, yes. But he had a bitter quarrel with those at home before he filed his petition. Will wanted them to lend him enough to keep him afloat and they wouldn't."

"And this time?" asked Marion.

"Walter came next day. Their mother was ill then. He took Bill back with him and they drove in a taxi from Minterne station so that Bill should not be seen and recognized. And . . . that's all."

"All?" said Marion.

"All I can tell you to-night," Lottie answered. "I think I'm tired, Marion. Well . . . it was in November that Bill lost sixpence in the mud and wrote to Walter and heard his mother was dying. She died in December. Bobbie was born in January; here, at Margaret's Mead."

V

As Lottie put her feet to the ground and stood up Marion knew that she had told her all she ever meant to tell. She was not surprised, for when old Mrs. Napier died Lottie had written to her, laconically:

"Will's mother is dead. I'm not going to pretend I'm sorry; she was no friend to me. But I'm

glad to say she has made some provision for us. We are going to live at Margaret's Mead. I can't say any more. Please burn this letter. But the bad days are over, thank God; they're over!"

While Lottie lit the lamp and drew the casement curtains with a rattle of rings on rods, Marion tried to fill in the gaps in her story and ran over past history for a clue. She recalled old Mr. Napier's death shortly before Will's marriage and Will's refusal to join in his mother's scheme of taking the farm adjoining Margaret's Mead so as to more conveniently divide the two. Abetted by Lottie he had avowed a preference for town life, and his ill-advised purchase of a butcher's business had followed. Folly, incompetence, and inexperience had soon brought them to the pass Lottie had described. All this was plain enough; but somehow present prosperity was left unexplained. For when Marion received Lottie's cryptic letter about her mother-in-law's death she had naturally expected more explicit information; but none was forthcoming. Annoyed, Marion took an early opportunity of obtaining a copy of Mrs. Napier's will. It carried her no further, for Will's name was not mentioned.

She had asked herself then: "Why burn Lottie's letter?" Now she added to her former question: "Why a hired taxi that Will should not be seen?" She could not quite understand it, though dimly she began to guess.

Now, before she could remind Lottie that it was

nearly ten, her brother-in-law came in followed by a man whom she did not at once recognize. Lottie turned to them languidly, asking, "Where have you been?" and added, "Walter, it is years since you have seen Marion."

From where he stood he gave her a crisp, curt, "How d'you do?" Marion was conscious of little but distaste, over and above a quick, overmastering surprise. Obviously, it was years since she had seen Walter, and imagination rather than memory had given him to her as an older and smaller duplicate of Will. But Walter bore no resemblance to his brother. Where Will was heavy and flabby, sallow, full faced and full lipped, given to curves and creases, Walter was small, wiry, light on his feet; red in the face, with high, pronounced cheekbones, sharp features, and obstinate mouth and chin. His restless glance, penetrating and aggressive, affected Marion's nerves with the menace of bared steel. His forehead was imposing and his expression that of tireless energy and dogged force of will. The Napier nose, wide and blunt, coarsened a face otherwise arrestingly keen.

All this Marion saw in one quick, quiet glance; then she fell to inward scorn of the lack of *savoir faire* that kept him stiff and awkward, incapable of the outstretched hand and tactful word of greeting. His hands were bony, untended and rough; he had an evil taste in ties. She said to Will:

"I am sure Lottie is very tired."

He turned to his wife.

"Bed, little woman," he said. His voice held a fond, caressing intonation. Lottie leant against him. She asked again:

"Where have you been?"

"Look in the pantry on your way upstairs! And we've had supper since we came in, remember. Besides, we thought you'd be wanting to talk. Good-night, Lottie."

"Look in at the children when you come up," she said, not moving.

He put her gently from him as her attitude invited him to do, and kissed her fondly on both cheeks. Walter watched them. As her husband's hand rested on her shoulder Lottie turned her lips to it, once and twice. Then she went across to her brother-in-law and said, lightly:

"Good-night, Walter."

He touched the hand she extended and dropped it and turned away. Lottie asked:

"Are you coming now, Marion?"

Marion suffered her brother-in-law's kiss. Experimentally she offered her hand to Walter. He gripped it casually and said: "Good-night." She saw that his eyes followed Lottie.

VI

Lottie did not look into the pantry on her way upstairs. Marion thought of it because Walter's words had recalled to her how it used to look after her uncle had returned from a successful evening's shoot. She wondered if it would contain now, as then, the strung rabbits, perchance a hare, and the

beautiful blue-gray of pigeons' plumage; or would there be wild duck or a moor hen?

As she followed Lottie, she fancied she remembered how, even in those far-off days, her interest had been mixed with pain and compassion for the soft, wild, slaughtered things; an instinct of rebellion against pain and death.

From her mental picture of the pantry's evening aspect she flew to that of the sunny morning hour, as she had seen it when she joined her aunt and uncle at their lunch. There would be the high wide window, framed in bright green leaves; the bricked floor offering so many varying colours; the curious mingled smell of cheese and fruit and various foodstuffs; the shelves lining the walls, filled with neat rows of preserves and pickles in shining glass or drab stoneware; then the small table and the stools; Windsor stools for her aunt and uncle and the little ones from the dining room for her and Lottie; her aunt and uncle busy with bread and cheese and mugs of ale from the huge barrel at one side—old-fashioned two-handled mugs with pictures that her soul had delighted in; the clear, brown ale, too, with its froth and odour, and uncle's cheese that hopped about his plate; then herself and Lottie with milk and cake, or fruit, or bread-and-butter and jam, or cream and junket . . . .

She said suddenly to Lottie: "Do you have ten o'clock lunch in the pantry now?"

Lottie laughed. "Good gracious, no! Are we still in the year one? We don't breakfast till half-

past eight. Walter and Will have their vacuum flasks filled with tea overnight and just get a snack themselves before they go out. I should never keep a maid, if I wanted a cooked breakfast ready by seven. Besides, it's really best for them to have something before they go out at all, I think."

Marion reminded herself of the passing of time. When she last stayed at Margaret's Mead she was ten years old; now she was twenty-four! She listened to Lottie as her rather elaborate preparations for the night were made, and felt a queer tightening round her heart when at last the thin, tired face was laid against the pillow. She asked her sister, casually:

"Do you sleep well, Lottie?"

"Sometimes," Lottie answered. She added, fretfully: "I am not sleepy now. If one could get over the first long hours!"

"I'll bring you some hot milk, that's a good opiate," said Marion.

The tired face brightened. "You darling! Marion, be careful to look at the saucepan—the blue enamel one. I never trust a maid over a milk saucepan; I should just scour it out before I used it. The things are on the shelf above the trough."

Marion smiled at the characteristic speech as she turned from the big, airy, spotless room and took her way to the kitchen. Well-ordered cleanliness greeted her. She lit a candle to find her way to the half-empty dairy, with the household supply of milk and eggs and butter standing lonely upon

its shelves. Cool night breezes crept in through the many narrow window slits; the stone floor gleamed white; shadows flitted in dim recesses. Marion held the candle high, peering round.

"This house," she murmured to herself, "must have filled my dreams. I do nothing here but remember!"

Before she left Lottie for the night she drew back the curtains from her windows west and south, and set the casements open to their widest. Lottie refused her kiss.

"We'll take no risks," she said. "In six months' time, perhaps, when its acknowledged I'm quite well. Imagine this room in the winter, with frost and snow! It was like being out in a storm. Goodnight, dear; sleep well."

Marion blew her a kiss, smiling, and closed the door gently behind her with an altered face. She went downstairs again unhesitatingly. There had been a light under the oak room door. She thought: "Now for a talk with Will."

But when she opened the oak room door it was Walter she found seated at the table poring over a book.

VII

Walter Napier took little notice of her entrance. He looked up, but neither rose nor spoke, and in a moment or two, finding him quite content to continue his reading and ignore her, Marion remarked:

"I was looking for Will."

He glanced up sharply. "Is he wanted?" he asked.

"I wanted to talk to him," replied Marion. Walter's interest subsided. He said, in a careless, final way:

"He's gone to bed."

His manner irritated Marion. She stared at him steadily until he looked up; whereupon she remarked, quietly:

"I expect you will do equally well."

She was pleased that he betrayed intense surprise. But he stood up at last, in interest rather than politeness. He said:

"Then if you don't mind we'll talk out of doors. Lottie's room is overhead."

He had a boor's manners, and left Marion to follow him out of the room. It appeared that the garden also was tabooed as being too close to Lottie, for he led the way through kitchen and courtyard and across the lane to the paddock gate. On that he leant an arm and turned to Marion.

"Hope you're not conventional," said he.

Marion could have struck him; for tone, even more than speech, revealed all his brother's overconsciousness of sex. She answered, coolly:

"It isn't a very striking breach of the conventions to stroll fifty yards from the house on a summer evening, is it?"

He pulled out his watch and turned its luminous face to her. The hands showed quarter to eleven. Then without giving her time to comment, he said:

"You want to know exactly what the specialist said about Lottie?"

"I do."

"Will couldn't have told you for he doesn't know, except what I chose to tell him. He couldn't pluck up courage to hear the verdict direct."

Scathing scorn of his brother's weakness spoke in his voice: then it took a lower but even fiercer note. He said, almost under his breath, but with an indescribable vehemence:

"The woman never lived who loved life more than Lottie. So with luck, if you, and we, do our utmost for her, she may have another six months. She can't have more!"

Misery seized Marion in its grip: she was silent; the truth was hardly worse than her fear, though Walter had written her of a year. She saw Lottie on the platform, elate and buoyant; Lottie eagerly pointing out remembered scenes; Lottie saying fondly: "My home—your home." "The bad time is over."

Walter had not expected silence. He had thought himself prepared for doubt, for tears. Marion surprised and disarmed him. He asked, brutally:

"Are you prepared to stay and do your utmost? There's no prospect of recovery and some danger from infection."

His words cut athwart the summer dark in which, for brief moments, Marion had sought to dwell alone with her memories; she replied, quietly:

"I told Will what I would do when I answered his letter."

"If I had seen your answer I should not ask," retorted the man beside her, "you may be sure of that. Though the letter you answered was none of Will's. I dictated every word."

"I see," Marion answered; her heart was beating painfully. "I should like to know exactly the position Will occupies in this place?"

"You mean, who is master? I am. You mean, what is Will? To me he is just the man Lottie happens to love! I've no use for him, otherwise."

"Does Will know that?" asked Marion, with a mildness of sarcasm that surprised her. Before Walter could reply she added, quickly: "If you want me to stay here you had better tell me exactly what the position is."

Walter Napier looked at her and seemed to pause for mental calculation. Again in the silence Marion strove to find comfort in the encompassing friendliness of the calm summer night. Then he asked, curtly:

"You know something about business?"

"A little."

"Anything about bankruptcy?"

"Not much."

"You know Will was bankrupt? It was a bad bankruptcy, about as rotten as such things can be; so they would not give him his discharge. You know what that means?"

"It means that his affairs may be re-opened and

a levy made upon any available assets," hazarded Marion, from a rather limited experience.

"So you do know something about business," Walter commented, dryly. "Very well, then. My mother quite made up her mind that she was not going to leave her money to Will's creditors. She didn't, as no doubt you know?"

"I know he was left nothing in her will," said Marion. "Apparently she did something else?"

"She did what I suggested," answered Walter, "and what nobody knows besides Will, and Lottie, and you. She saw Will—I thought it as well that nobody should know he came here—and told him that she was leaving me everything on condition that I employed him as my bailiff at a given salary and made him a yearly present of a hundred pounds for ten years."

Marion stared at him. "A verbal promise," she exclaimed, involuntarily.

"Rather more than a promise," said Walter, grimly. "But you don't suppose a written agreement would have been of any use? Imagine me refusing to keep the terms and Will endeavouring to compel me by producing an agreement made with the obvious purpose of defrauding his creditors! No. Instead she made us swear by everything she thought we held dear. You didn't know my mother?"

"I've heard a lot about her," said Marion.

"That's not knowing her. Her mother was a gipsy of long descent. She had a long head—

mother added foresight to the cheap gipsy cunning. She took a tremendous interest in life. It heartened her up on her deathbed to think of the possibilities of things happening with Lottie and Will and I housed under one roof. A sort of wild beast show!" His voice took a fierce, challenging note. "That was my mother. I hate your tame, half-alive women."

"As I loathe your wild-beast men," retorted Marion, on a spurt of uncontrollable anger.

"Thanks." He turned his eyes upon her with derisive approbation as he lounged against the gate. "So you have that much of Lottie in you? From what I'd heard of you I imagined you one of the tame cats. Hadn't we better go in? We might get to like one another."

Marion made no mistake. She told herself that she had taken the measure of this man; this man with cruel perceptions stretching out after people's sensibilities and with a cruel delight in jarring them; with his tremendous physical magnetism that had at first frightened her, and that still alternately fascinated and repelled. She felt she might sometimes enjoy fighting it; meeting it and doing vigorous battle. She said, calmly:

"You will do what you like, I am staying another five minutes."

Again she was conscious of his surprise. He stood silent a minute or two; then he said, in a matter-of-fact way:

"The position being what it is, do you intend to stay here?"

"I do."

"For the salary Will mentioned?"

"I shall ask him to make it twenty-four pounds instead of twenty; I was already earning twenty; my next rise would have been to twenty-four. When I go back to bookkeeping after this interval I may have to again take twenty."

"So that is the condition?"

The quality of his voice made Marion flame again. "It is no condition," she remarked. "I should stay if he refused; if he was mean enough to give me nothing at all."

"By which you mean if I am mean enough," said Walter Napier. "I shall decide the question."

Marion threw a wealth of scorn into her next words.

"So that is what a verbal undertaking means when made by a Napier?"

She thought for a moment that the primitive man at her side might strike her. But it seemed Walter Napier had a measure of self-control. He ran his fingers through his hair with a curious characteristic gesture and backward jerk of his head. Then he broke into quick, impetuous speech.

"Understand me," he said. "Everything Will has he owes to me; or rather to Lottie. My mother never forgave him for refusing to join in with us about Piper's Farm, nor for marrying Lottie. She hated Lottie; she was bound to hate any woman who married her son. She would not have left Will a cent but for my persuasion. Never mind what arguments I used; the fact remains that every

penny Will had from my mother would have been mine if I had not chosen otherwise."

"Yet your mother made you swear by everything you held sacred," Marion reminded him.

"Quite so. You don't suppose *she* thought the whole thing came from me? By the time we had finished it was her plan, her darling scheme, as of course it had to be. And you don't ask what we swore to? The main point was that no penny of her money should go to satisfy Will's creditors, and the second that we should keep it secret. My mother was tired of seeing us live down bad odours."

"No doubt," said Marion.

"No doubt," he echoed, jeeringly. "I should have supposed you pictured us insensible to such things! As to the exact terms of the bargain and my method of keeping it—you know a little of Will and a little of business—think it over!"

Without a further word he strode away from her, across the lane, through the courtyard, and into the house.

VIII

For a moment Marion listened intently, fearing he might forget her and bolt and bar the door. But a bar of light from the kitchen shone clear and a little wider after he had crossed the threshold, showing that he had left the door still more agape.

Then she released her attitude of tension and for a few minutes stood still, the tears welling to her eyes and falling unchecked. It was the end of a

day full to the brim of pain and emotion. Lottie was very dear to her and the things Lottie did and the men Lottie liked so utterly the reverse. And she was to lose Lottie! Could that flame be quenched, that eager, loving, trifling spirit quelled? Was death the end of human personality? And if not, once lost, could it again be found?

Only the old questions, faced often, rarely answered. Beside them the recent encroachments of Walter Napier upon her thought and time seemed jarring impertinences to be dismissed and forgotten. Only—only he loved Lottie. There was the unmistakable, incomprehensible thing! And Lottie undoubtedly knew it; knew it and rejoiced in it and trifled with it! His love to her was a thing she had evoked so easily that she could say to her sister with gaiety, "Now let him love you."

"As though it was a game one played," reflected Marion, absently. "I tossed the ball awhile; now I give it to you; you toss it. Somehow I don't think I've the gift, or the wish, to play this particular game. Certainly not with the men who love Lottie. Perhaps different men require a different skill."

Her eyes were dry enough now, and she told herself that she mustn't think of death again, only weak and silly emotion lay that way. There were things to do. Besides, she had done without Lottie before; Lottie had had but few thoughts to spare for her of late. "Only she is all I have in the world," thought Marion, and checked herself upon

the thought, looked resolutely round upon the sleeping countryside, and went toward the house.

Very carefully and quietly she closed the door, turned the lock, and shot the bolts. Lottie, she hoped, would be sleeping. What a life she was leading Walter! What a dog's life!

"You know a little of Will—and a little of business. Think it over."

Marion thought it over. Will, with his weak extravagances and love of ease; Will, easily swayed by the last stronger mind he met; Will, a born blabber and boaster, foolishly vain, foolishly fond. Could any treatment have been meted out to him that would provide for his prosperity better than this? And his new religion that yet allowed him to forget his just debts; that could combine with the most deliberate purpose of evading them!

Quietly undressing, Marion filled in the gaps in Walter's narrative and Lottie's brief summaries. "I can't say any more. Please burn this letter." Marion wondered whether it was a criminal offence to know that you would soon be able to pay a portion of your debts while invoking the Bankruptcy Act to annul them. She thought not. The law provided many avenues of escape for debtors, erring as much on the one side now as it had formerly erred on the other. But undoubtedly local opinion would have its say in the matter. Especially since the Napier fortunes were founded on an opportune bankruptcy many years ago.

Marion remembered how her relatives, people of sterling honour and the strictest integrity, had

scorned the Napiers as sharp-dealing, money-lending, money-making folk, who affected to despise the rich and ground the faces of the poor; who impoverished the land they farmed and seized hungrily upon any flaw in a lease that could be wrested to their advantage.

Suddenly she brought her thoughts back from the pleasant places of the past, where those around her had loved so naturally and sincerely the things that were good, to this present, where her people were the Napiers and their affairs and their conduct her concern.

Lottie was Marion's only near relative.

"No doubt," Marion carried her thoughts on, "Will would have resisted some of the proposals at first; would have thought it consistent with his new convictions to make the payment of his debts a duty. And he would have been shown a nearer duty in wife and child. One could imagine each stock argument. Will had got his discharge within two months of his mother's death."

"It is so late," she murmured to herself, when at last she stood up from her prayers, a slim figure of considerable charm and beauty, with bright hair that escaped from its night confinement and stole out in caressing curls and tendrils against her white neck and broad brow; with large wide eyes heavily lashed and lidded, and the soft bloom of youth still tinting cheek and lip. None the less for her tiredness she unlocked a little writing case and took from it a postcard, addressed in a firm, masculine hand.

She read first the address: "Miss Harland, South Coast A.B.C. Aldwich.," with the left-hand note "Please forward," and then the message. It was brief:

I want to know what you are doing.

Marion held it, ruminating. She imagined circumstances in which its very brevity would have had its own appeal, with the bare simplicity of its linked "I" and "you." From a lover, even, it might not have been amiss! And she shook her head regretfully. For this was no lover, she well knew. It simply meant that the writer had been good enough to give her certain sound business advice; that she had promised to tell him how she prospered, and that she had not done so.

So he wrote, with a kindness of sustained interest she had not reckoned on, "I want to know what you are doing."

Suddenly Marion knew, as though a voice spoke in her ear, why she had had to look at the postcard. It was to warm herself at the thought of someone who cared, even so slightly, what she was doing!

For on this first day of meeting with her sister after years of absence no question of her welfare had been asked, no single question! "I might have been a tortoise hibernating," thought Marion, and smiled at the conceit. She knew well that the interest of her arrival and her doings here centred not in the least in her, but in Lottie.

Then suddenly the meagreness of that to which she turned for warmth struck her; just this much

of kindly interest from a man in whose busy life she was the merest incident.

"But it is all I have," thought Marion.

She saw that it would not do to ponder this; she would be wallowing in maudlin self-pity. She nodded cheerfully to the postcard and thrust it under her pillow, remarking:

"I will answer you to-morrow."

Dewy Morn

I

In the pearl gray of a misty morning Marion tripped down the grass paths of the kitchen garden to make her plans for the day. Lottie still liked to share the housekeeping so she gave no more attention to the vegetables than to note that there was a big picking of peas and that the scarlet runners might very well be left another day. Her concern was with the fruit trees—an overgrown, prickly, disorderly looking mass at the bottom of the garden—where she soon stood overlooking them with a rather comical expression of anxiety and dismay.

Cobwebs, heavily hung with dew, stretched from bush to bush and festooned the boughs; the ground was damp, the air freshly odorous.

"The sun will have to be well up before I begin picking," thought Marion, surveying the laden boughs. "Everything is so dripping wet. And how hot it will be!" She thought of the sun beating down upon the back of her bare neck while with bent head and bowed back she stripped the lower branches. She thought soberly of the thorns, the stickiness, the stains, the dishevelment. But soon her look cleared; she smiled amusedly, saying aloud:

"I shall borrow a sunbonnet!"

With that she turned on her heel. She had found decision. The black currants must be picked first as the most popular and really useful; she cast an anxious eye on the reds where the birds were making such depredations. Then her steps were arrested. On the damp grass paths no sound gave warning of the approach of a newcomer, and she had turned to find Walter Napier a few yards away from her.

He said "Good morning," and "You're out early" with a noticeable advance toward friendliness since their encounter of a month before. Marion replied, quite casually:

"See what a town-bred I am, after all. I had some idea of fruit picking before breakfast!"

He relaxed to his hard-won smile as he came close to her; so close that their sleeves brushed. He remarked, curtly:

"Heavy dew."

"So I must postpone it until the sun is high," went on Marion. Her colour rose under his unwavering eye. She knew it scrutinized her; she never knew whether it admired or disdained.

Marion herself was diffident about her looks, sometimes pleased and sometimes jarred: so she lacked the calm assurance of a self-confident beauty, too often its owner's sole claim to the title. To-day she wore a short tweed skirt and blue blouse from the open neck of which her white throat and shapely head rose flower-like. Walter Napier missed no grace of poise, no perfection of tint, no beauty of

curve and line. But his gaze held disdain; Marion made no mistake in her intuitive doubt. He was remarking to himself that, with all the stir and pleasure the girl's indisputable beauty could give to his senses, it left his passion for Lottie—Lottie, emaciated and hectic; Lottie, in health graceful rather than pretty; Lottie, changeful, capricious, and vain; unchallenged and undisturbed. He would have given much to unlove Lottie. Gratefully would he have let this girl, this chit, with her young beauty, her nice morality, her nimble brains, dislodge her sister from his heart. But Marion could not work the oracle. No utterance of hers fired him. She pleased his senses—stirred them even—but left his passion undisturbed.

Yet he made the attempt, trying contact, as experimentally as he had tried to awake jealousy in Lottie to ease his smart. Marion, therefore, wishing to return to the house, found her path blocked.

"There is no need for you to do all this fruit picking," he remarked. "You came to look after Lottie, not to enter upon an economy campaign."

"I can't let it all spoil," returned Marion. "I don't let it interfere with looking after Lottie."

"I know that. It eases her mind, too. She has the same inbred hatred of waste. But it keeps you working morning, noon, and night."

"I must work," Marion replied. Her reason for working made her forget whom she was talking to: she went on as she would have done to herself,

hardly conscious that she was thinking the familiar thoughts aloud.

"I must work. If I read I find that the drama we are living unfolds itself between me and the drama of the printed page. If I go anything but exhausted to bed I lay awake thinking of it. But if I set myself a task, saying that I must do so much before a certain time, or before sundown, I bend all my energies to working and calculating whether I can get it done. I occupy my thoughts and I tire myself out."

Walter Napier stared at her now in earnest.

"We jog along here," said he, "seeing no one, doing everlastingly the same things. I hardly know where drama comes upon the scene."

"Don't you?" said Marion. "I should have thought you felt it in your very bones. Will and Lottie and you—and now me, as spectator. 'A wild-beast show', I think you called it. I don't find it exactly that, though something like it."

Walter Napier no longer stood in her path. He would have been very glad for her to go. But sombreness seemed to have settled on Marion as the summer morning brightened.

"Will and Lottie and you," she repeated. "Just think of it. Will and you caring for her so intensely and knowing she's going; and Lottie not knowing, and not caring about you, either of you, very much. Oh, I know she's warm hearted and affectionate—she does love you both, differently, in her way. You give her so much of what she wants—love and admiration—men's love—her natural food."

Napier interpolated, hoarsely, against his will, in a sort of lost surprise:

"You don't know your sister."

"Oh, yes, I do," said Marion. "I know her exactly. She doesn't for a moment mean to hurt you, but you're so amusing, and it's a game she loves to play! To flatter you and make Will angry; to openly love Will and watch you wince; to keep all the men about the place, down to the youngest labourer, dancing eager attendance on her whims; to play you all off one against another, and then to see me watching, and wincing, and hating it all!" She stopped, and lifted brooding eyes to his. "It's the game she loves, and it keeps her alive."

Walter Napier felt the truth of every word—words which gave the truth to him as by light of revelation.

"If she was not dying it would be comedy," commented Marion, concluding, "As it is . . ."

He interrupted, sneering, a smile twisting his thin lips.

"Don't look for tragedy," said he. "I'm not Lottie's lover."

Marion turned untroubled eyes on him.

"I did not say you were," she answered. "There's a wide gulf between anything I said and that! But please understand, though I love my sister, I am not a gull as well as a spectator. I shall see to it that you do not make Lottie jealous by practising on me."

"No living woman would be jealous of you," cried

Napier, stung, "You haven't it in you to make them."

"Thank you," said Marion, lightly. "Then why try?" She made to step past him on the narrow path and, whether to detain her for a retort or in anger at a mocking goad in her voice, Napier caught at her hand. Marion let him grasp it, with a smile on her lips and a light in her eyes that were Lottie's.

Napier flung the warm, vibrant hand from him with an oath, and the mockery of Marion's glance became exactly Lottie's, as one sister will resemble another.

On the instant the thing she had, unconsciously in the last few moments, played for, happened. The derisive mockery of her glance, the haunting resemblance to Lottie, struck on Napier's senses like a whip. He took a forward step; seized, not her hand but her slim waist; and felt the supple muscles stiffen in his grasp.

With a single strong movement Marion released herself. She sent cold eyes to his, said, on a scathing accent of scorn: "Be careful!" and sped from him up the path.

She said to herself disjointedly as she ran: "How dare he say that? How horrible I am! Was it my fault? I don't care; I would do it again!"

II

A door in the thatched wall of the kitchen garden opened into the courtyard. As Marion reached it she stayed her steps and turned her thoughts

toward her next task. It was too early for breakfast preparations to be going forward, but the house was well awake: Kate beating her mats against the courtyard wall; Clare's voice issuing from the open windows of the nursery, and Phyllis the nurse-maid answering from the adjoining bedroom in a jerky voice that suggested the energetic making of beds.

Lottie would almost certainly be awake. Marion did not go into the house but opened a door in the opposite wall of the courtyard into the pleasure garden. Here was stillness, beauty, fragrance: a riot of delicate and brilliant hues in a restful setting of green. Apparently nothing moved behind the casements opening wide upon it. Arrived under Lottie's window Marion very softly called her name.

"Yes, dear. Wide awake but not getting up yet. Where are you?"

Marion read fatigue into the low tones. She answered:

"In the garden now. But coming up to you since you are awake."

She slipped through the porch and up the wide, shallow stairs. Entering Lottie's room she did not need to ask how she was. Bending, she kissed her sister's brow and said, gently:

"Your cough has been troublesome. You have had a restless night."

Lottie answered: "It's good to have you here to take the reins, and to know I needn't trouble about anything. How early you are!"

"It is such a lovely morning, dear," said Marion. "After breakfast you must come down and enjoy the garden. I'm going to wheel your bed nearer the window now, so that you can look out upon it."

She busied herself in the room, doing the thousand and one things that lend it freshness and ease a patient of all fatigue. Lottie watched her languidly, accepting her ministrations with the unquestioning gratitude that made her so easy to serve. But presently she took Marion's breath away with the question:

"I wonder if I shall be able to get up to-day?"

She smiled at her sister's startled, arrested face. She added:

"You see, dear, I am always so much better than I was yesterday, but so much worse than I was a fortnight ago!"

Marion went over to her and Lottie caught one of her hands in both hers. She said, with a heart-rending smile:

"That is the way of it, isn't it, Marion?"

Marion answered, with tremulous lips: "The heat tries you."

"I know," said Lottie. "It tries you, too. It has worn your nerves so thin that it troubles you to face me sometimes without tears. That's all, dear. A fortnight ago I could not have been reconciled to any thought but of getting better. Now—with this heat——" the inflection of mockery in her voice was delicate enough to be missed by any ears but Marion's; "I am so tired that I really cannot care."

She kept a smile on her lips, and it was the smile that broke Marion: that, and the serene beauty and freshness of the summer day. If Lottie had released her hand she would have hurried away from her and returned soon with new disguises. But Lottie held her hand with gentle tenacity, and Marion could not move. Moreover, she did not know which of two Lotties addressed her: the one so gaily in love with life, so unconsciously cruel in her coquettish caprice, and so consistently lovable withal, or the Lottie of strong and simple faith, turning to a God who was Father and Friend; the loving mother and fond wife of homely and practical simplicity.

Such Marion felt the dual personality of her sister to be. And the first Lottie might be put off with bright evasions, but the second—dare she offer cheats and illusions to her?

So for a few moments she stood in silence and in prayer. Lottie might have many days yet of renewed strength and tranquil gladness. Was she to throw over them the shadow of an inexorable doom? At long last her prayers were answered. Lottie gave her her lead. She murmured, gently:

"But don't grieve, Mary. I am so tired to-day. And then I give up hope. But I ought not to sadden you by expressing my convictions; because, you see, if to-morrow I am less tired, I shall be convinced of the exact reverse."

Marion knew in a moment where she stood. Lottie was not wistfully seeking another opinion; not wishing to be enlightened as to her condition if

light was to be had. Had she been doing so Marion felt that she must tell her the truth. But it was plain that Lottie was content to gauge her health from her sensations, her progress from her own observation. Nay, more, she preferred to be left to her own opinions and conjectures, with human evasion of a truth undesired.

Marion answered her last speech with: "I should like to see you much better than I have seen you yet." She doubted that Lottie heard her. Clare's small treble voice and pattering feet sounded in the passage and in the next moment Phyllis entered with Bobbie frantically clutching at her skirt. Walking was as yet a tremendous adventure for Lottie's son and heir.

Marion ran off while the children stayed, intent on other tasks. When she returned Lottie had an instant question:

"What plans have you for to-day, Mary?"

"None," said Marion, "except black currants."

Lottie laughed and frowned.

"I want them picked and I want you myself to-day," she said. "How is it to be managed? Can't Will spare a man? Ask him, Marion. It's too close for me down by the currant bushes, and I don't want to be left alone."

"What do you want me to do?" Marion asked, with the caressing intonation that gave Lottie all she asked.

"To sit in the garden by my chair and clear up the basket of mending. Then when I'm feeling fit I can go on embroidering Clare's frock without

conscience pricks. And I want you to talk—tell me things. The thought of it rests me, Mary. I can't read to-day. But you and I in the shade, cool and lazy. Not me resting and you hot and tired, slaving away at black currants!"

They laughed, Lottie's voice held a note of disgust so deep. Marion said, lightly and cheerfully:

"No black currants. A long confab in the shade and all the socks mended! Say I'm an angel. I hate darning."

"It isn't darning," said Lottie, literally, "and it isn't socks. It's patching; the pieces of woven mending came yesterday. Marion, are you getting on better with Walter?"

"Getting on better?" repeated her sister. "We have always 'got on' quite well." She stood very still and watchful.

"I know," said Lottie. "Even to the point of wandering off together the first night you came."

Marion answered, in a voice carefully matter of fact:

"I think not, dear. We certainly talked for perhaps half an hour at the paddock gate."

Lottie flushed crimson. "You did?" she said, in a voice of intense surprise.

It was instantly plain to Marion that Walter had boasted and Lottie had not believed him. She wished she had been more circumspect, and left off at denial. Lottie added:

"And what did you find to talk about?"

Marion remembered their conversation all too

clearly. She felt at a loss. Finally she said, blunderingly:

"About whether I should stay and what money I wanted, and—ancient history came up somehow—about old Mrs. Napier."

Lottie looked furious. She said, passionately:

"What has that to do with Walter? It is my affair and Will's. What did he tell you about his mother—that she didn't leave Will a penny?"

Marion replied, evenly: "No; he confined himself to comments on her gipsy descent. He seemed to suspect me of quarrelling with it."

She strove to speak lightly; to turn the torrent of her sister's gathering wrath. Lottie hated to be taken unawares, to find her acuteness at fault. Too often it provoked her into a fit of wild, unreasoning, ungoverned rage. It did so now. Impossible for Marion to say anything that would not augment the storm. Had she not been deceived in her sister? Marion to flirt—Marion! And with Walter whom she affected to despise! Walter, who was Lottie's, body and soul!

She declaimed in a raised, shaken voice:

"And so you do quarrel with it. You do nothing but despise Will, and Will's people. You hate to see Margaret's Mead in their hands—you think it's polluted! Now you throw her gipsy descent at me—sneering at my children's grandmother! Who are you likely to marry, I should like to know? Do you think a gentleman is likely to come your way because father happened—father happened——"

She choked with coughing. Marion rushed to her.

"Lottie—Lottie, dear," she cried, in a voice of anguish.

Lottie's eyes fixed themselves on her face as she fought for breath; in anger first, and then in fear.

"Oh, Marion," she uttered, helplessly.

Marion thought she would have given her life gladly to recall the last five minutes. She saw that the dreaded hæmorrhage had begun.

III

By twelve o'clock life at Margaret's Mead had resumed the normal. The doctor had been and gone. Lottie, wan and exhausted, lay back amongst her pillows with no hint of the morning's unreasoning resentment in her wide, courageous eyes. Marion sat at needlework by the open window, all thought of "getting up" for Lottie definitely set aside.

There had been no breakfast hour that day. Marion's report had sent Walter scurrying off in his car to catch the doctor before he started on his round. Will's anxiety had served him as food. Now Marion was pondering, as she sat quietly plying her needle, whether or not at the dinner hour she should charge Walter with his share in causing the morning's catastrophe.

Was it worth while? she wondered. Would it teach him a lesson, cause him to cease his restless, fruitless attempts to fan Lottie's interest in him to a flickering resemblance of his own fierce passion?

Or would it but inflate his absurd vanity; tempt him to believe that her outburst was the fruit of passion rather than of pique?

"Lottie is not capable of passion," argued Marion, clear sightedly. "Men are just her curious, exciting toys! She loves Will, true. She has got used to him—he is good to her. And being a man she loves him differently from the way she loves me—oh, quite differently. But she wouldn't suffer anguish over Will."

She stared in front of her, suddenly not so sure. She imagined circumstances, somehow getting past Will's unctuousness and fat to a man who cut a pathetic figure. The situation had to be primitive, but there at last was Will, pitiable rather than heroic, and Lottie, agonized. But Walter—Walter, she decided, angrily, was not in the picture. Yet these men, between them, were killing Lottie.

She brought her thoughts back and glanced solicitously toward her sister. Lottie smiled at her, and she smiled encouragingly back.

"First," her thoughts ran on, "Will marries and starves her. Those dreadful times—and Lottie never strong. Pleurisy, in lodgings, with no money, and Will as sole nurse! Walter would say the mischief was begun before then. He would say it begun with the bad food and cold shops in those horrible sub-offices. Why did Lottie stay in such places? She was a competent telegraphist." Marion knew in her heart that Lottie stayed, very often, because she hated to add them to the long list of the places her hasty temper lost her.

All these things, the humiliating, undeniable facts of their lives—their poverty and dependence—Lottie's candour had made hatefully familiar to the Napiers. So Walter could retort upon her.

"If I could respect them," thought Marion, "I would not mind their knowing. But it is like being naked before strangers."

For a few minutes she paused over thoughts of their chequered childhood, alternate of plenty and penury; over memories of her father doomed to the half-success that kills. She asked herself, sturdily, why should she not be proud of her father, of the talent that had raised him above the common rut? Why should she not joy in the clean, honest records of her forbears: decent folk—hard working, God fearing—not given to accumulation either of wealth or power—perhaps all the better for that—just simple, cleanly, useful lives, sweet and wholesome as home-made bread? "Better stock," thought Marion, "to be born of than long lines of ancestry with minds and bodies all warped and slackened by perpetual possession of wealth and power."

But ruthlessly she brought her thoughts back to the present.

"This excitement, that was so bad for Lottie, yet which she craved, and which Walter Napier was alone at hand to supply, could she do anything to stop it at its source?" She soon recognized that she could not, envisaging herself by the way as Walter's betrothed or Walter's wife, and so seeing herself, humorously, as a source of perpetual joy to Lottie. What additional scope that would pro-

vide for experiment and intrigue! Or would Lottie find the joy departed if imprisonment to her couch kept much of the developments hidden from her?

Across these speculations how sinisterly came the question: "But how long will Lottie live?"

Marion rose restlessly. Lottie said, on the instant:

"I shall want you to talk to me after dinner. Tell me all they say downstairs. I begin to feel better."

Marion answered: "I'll turn myself into a news scavenger. Would you like me to read the paper, too?"

"People's reading voice always tires me," answered Lottie, apologetically. With mock apprehension she added, mischievously, "They can't read like me."

Marion winced at a truth. Lottie read so that you forgot she was reading, declining to adhere too strictly to the printed word, so rarely colloquial. She answered, however, gaily:

"More conceit! There's the dinner bell; I'm starving! I've tied a ribbon to your bell rope to bring it within easy reach. Here it is. Pull if you want me."

She caught up Bobbie to hush some noisy rebellion on her way downstairs.

IV

When she entered the dining room two pairs of eyes were turned upon her in wordless interrogation. Marion left them unanswered. She had come to

know that if once she allowed glances to take the place of words here, speech—rarely enough heard now—would hardly ever be vouchsafed her.

So she took her place wordlessly, with only a smile to Phyllis who relieved her of Bobbie, and a brighter warning one to Clare who was noisily drumming with her spoon upon the table.

Kate, entering from the kitchen, broke the silence.

"John and Jeames ha' looked in, miss, please, to knaw if Mrs. Napier be better."

"Tell them 'yes, thank you,' Kate," said Marion. She was aware of two pairs of eyes hungrily searching her face. "She is rested and seems to be gaining strength again. I will tell her they enquired." She saw Walter bite his thin lips as she ended, and the colour surge into Will's sallow face.

Walter spoke first. "You really think her better?" he asked. Will followed with: "She hadn't energy to speak when I was up with her last."

Marion congratulated herself. She had no wish to be cruel, only to rouse them from a taciturnity with which she felt she could not live. She responded circumspectly, forcing a grudging exchange of remarks, and arguing with herself: "Why should I let anxiety make them dumb?"

The dining room, a bright enough room in itself, was rendered almost hideous by a crimson wall paper topped with a horrible crude border of ships and sunset, circling in a way to suggest delirium. In daylight Marion had found even the oak room spoilt by modern furniture and coloured prints hung

at random, regardless of the panelling. Now she looked out of the opposite window on to a gay flower border thanking God for its gaiety and the restfulness of paddock and trees beyond.

Suddenly her brother-in-law said to her:

"Have you seen your letter from Greyladies?"

An angry gust of resentment swept over Marion. It was not enough that she was despoiled of her moment of keen pleasure—that moment when, entering, her eyes fell upon the square of white lying unopened upon the table and knew that only her letters were left lying so: that moment of anticipation and hope when she never failed to remember that often fate lies folded within a letter's flat compass. But also she was despoiled of the thrill that, in this case, would have followed recognition. A deep flush mantled and faded in her cheeks. She answered, vibrantly:

"I did not know there was one."

Walter reached a hand back to the sideboard, picked up the letter and handed it to her. She thought, angrily, that the whole household, save she and Lottie, knew of its arrival. She noticed the habitual sneer on Walter's lip become pronounced. No need to ask how they had known whom the letter came from. Across the flap of the envelope was neatly inscribed:

Greyladies

She let it lie, unopened, beside her plate.

Will remarked:

"I should have hardly thought you'd at once rake

up acquaintance with people who've ignored Lottie all these months. They pass her in the churchyard with no more than a nod."

"I'm not given to 'raking up' acquaintances," replied Marion. Her colour rose again.

Will cut his meat savagely. "You hardly expect me to believe that," he said, with a jerk of his head toward the letter.

Marion picked it up, her eyes shining.

"Have you read this?" she asked, in a high, clear voice.

"What d'you mean?" His glance was menacing as he looked up from his plate, his fork suspended in air.

"What I say," said Marion, her tones still high and clear. "You speak as though you knew its contents."

"I do, but without reading it. And look here, my girl, don't throw out insinuations of that sort here——"

Marion interrupted. "Whom are you addressing?"

The cold fury of her voice stopped him. She went on, clear and incisive:

"Learn to use my name if you address me. And please understand, once and for all, that I accept no criticism of my conduct from you in matters that do not concern you. As I shall certainly not be tempted to criticise yours."

The vibrations of anger were too much for a child of four. Clare began to cry. Will made haste to cover alarmed discomfiture under a show of solici-

tude. Walter's sarcastic glance and smile fell coldly on them all.

In this atmosphere Marion opened and read her letter from Greyladies.

MY DEAR MISS HARLAND,

My nephew tells me you have come to live at Margaret's Mead. I hope it may be true and, if so, that you will come and see an old woman who gets about very little.

I thought I saw you at Church last week, but my sight is dim and I was not sure that I recognized my little Mary. (Excuse the liberty, but we have such pleasant memories of that small person.) Any day, save Tuesday, will find me pouring out tea at four o'clock, and we should be so pleased if you would join us as of old.

Ever your sincere friend,
FRANCES WILSON.

This letter was fragrant—not of warehouse scent, but of a gray stone house where for generations linen had been laid away with tiny muslin bags of ever-fresh lavender between, in dark seasoned chests whose drawers ran silent and smooth. Of a house redolent of wood fires and pine cones and jars of pot pourri . . . Marion knew it well. The remembered fragrance brought it back to her as though it were but yesterday that she had climbed —a tiny, thin-legged little creature—into a high four-poster and between the snowy, fragrant sheets.

As the words "my little Mary" started up to greet her, her eyes swam in sudden tears. She

murmured, soundlessly, "Friend o' my heart," and then wondered where the phrase had sprung from.

On an impulse she handed the letter to her brother-in-law and repented as he took it. Would these men of sullen jealousies but hate her more?

For a wonder she proved to have done the right thing. Will grunted as he passed the letter back to her and said, grudgingly:

"I suppose you're fine and pleased?"

"Rather," said Marion. She added, diplomatically: "It was a change to be the favourite." Instantly she hated herself for a statement both cringing and untrue. Why should she for ever seek to conciliate Lottie's men, pandering to their ideas of her? Lottie had not been winsome as a child. Will went on:

"It will be a bit of news for Lottie."

Marion said, hastily: "Please don't tell her to-day. She did not get on with the Wilsons, we used to quarrel about them. And the least thing upsets her. The cause of her breakdown to-day was the idea that Walter and I had been discussing things we did not tell her about on the night I came." She looked at Walter squarely. "How came you to let her guess that?"

Walter ignored the question, but he whitened. Marion saw that he was stabbed. And Will interrupted to ask:

"But what about the nephew?"

"Mr. John Preston," answered Marion. "He is brother to the Prestons I was in business with. He stayed with them while I was there."

"Oh," said Will. "Him? He's married!"

Marion answered, briefly: "His daughter Dorothea is thirteen years old."

"Not even a widower," remarked Will, with what he took for sly humour.

The meal was over. Marion lifted Clare down from her high chair.

V

To Marion's intense relief Lottie was dozing when she returned to the sick room, and though she opened her eyes and languidly smiled on her sister's entrance, all wish for gossip and amusement had obviously evaporated. Marion guessed that it had been no more than the warring of her energetic will with the weakness and lassitude she felt to be assailing her, but it had none the less made problematic the question of how to maintain the placid passivity which was her only hope of healing. Never had a theory been more thoroughly and unwittingly exploded than that of "healing by the power of the mind over the body" by the disastrous results of Lottie's refusals to be ill.

Marion quietly took her work and sat down between the open windows where her glance could stray out to the garden stretched in still beauty before her or to the fields and hills beyond. She was aware of domestic wheels running smoothly, oiled rather than jarred by catastrophe. There had been volunteers for the stripping of the currant bushes and Kate had offered to turn them, under instruction, into jelly and jam. Phyllis had taken

off her charges with a dignified sense of her share of responsibility in "keeping the house quiet"; Marion felt herself the most unquiet thing there.

Only her lambent and brooding eyes would have given an onlooker to guess that her nerves were shaken and vibrant; so daintily tinted, so demurely still she sat in the afternoon quietude brooding over the homestead. Then the garden gate creaked as it swung on its hinges—she started nervously as she looked up and out to see whom it might be.

The newcomer was only in her view a moment. She turned her eyes intently upon Lottie, watching for her to be wakened by the ring that would presently follow.

But Lottie was not awakened. The ring was very gentle and tentative, quite unlike the ring Marion expected from the man she had seen entering at the gate. It was the ring, in fact, of one who had learnt to doubt the potentialities of strange doorbells; who was considerate for others, and who was very aware that there was an invalid in the house.

Marion doubted if the gentle, tentative ring would be heard in the kitchen. She said to herself, smiling:

"What a notable modification of his strength."

Listening, she heard the kitchen door open and Kate's step in the hall. She heard the click of the withdrawn latch and then the unmistakable timbre of a deep, characteristic, well-remembered voice. She thrilled to the voice, standing intent, with her eyes still watchfully on Lottie's.

Kate came cautiously upstairs and Marion quietly opened the door.

"I know," she answered Kate's unspoken words with her fingers to her lips. "Take my place, please, Kate, while I go down."

Kate detained her to say in a hoarse stage whisper before she tiptoed across the room:

"It's the baker's day, miss. He'll be here soon."

Marion answered: "I'll see him. What do we want?"

Kate's lips framed the word "Four." She reached the nearest chair, and Marion vanished, quietly closing the door.

VI

Marion had hardly gone before Lottie's gray-green eyes opened languidly, with a hint of amusement in them. She said, tranquilly:

"I am not asleep. Who is the caller?"

Kate looked concerned. She knew that her mistress should not talk. And she answered, hurriedly and fully:

"Mr. John Preston, m'm."

Lottie closed her eyes again contentedly. Here was something fresh to think about. She repeated, inwardly:

"Preston, Preston. What do I remember about Preston? Was it the name of Marion's last employer?"

After a minute or two she asked, stirring a little:

"What is he like, Kate? Does he look like a tradesman—a—a baker?"

"A baker, m'm?" repeated Kate, amazed. "Oh, no, m'm. He's quite a gentleman, m'm, is Mr. John."

Lottie opened her eyes wide this time: said with arrested surprise:

"Mr. John? Do you know him then?"

"Law, yes, m'm. Mr. John, of Greyladies."

Lottie stared at her; then she removed her gaze to the ceiling, and lay lazily ruminating. She remembered now—Marion had mentioned it, perhaps, in a letter a long time ago. Mr. Preston, Marion's employer, had been nephew to Miss Wilson, son of the sister whose husband had known so many ups and downs. Mr. John was doubtless one of the elder brothers, who had been started in life before the ebb of his father's fortunes. He would be the accountant—the eldest but one—Preston, Law, & Preston, of London and Liverpool —big guns in their way. Lottie soon had him placed. She seemed to remember him, a young man just married and married very young, when Marion and she were children running wild at Margaret's Mead. A little further reflection forced on her the fact that in those days Marion must have known him well, must have been a little pet of his—she was always at Greyladies, in some odd way a chum and favourite of them all.

So Lottie was soon absorbed in her task of piecing together scattered memories: seeing her sister as a quaint, serious, vivid, chattering child, a piquant source of amusement to her elders. Had Marion met John Preston at Southbay, she won-

dered, and if so why had she not mentioned him? It did not occur to Lottie that interest in her sister's affairs she had shown none.

Then for an amused minute she envisaged Marion, her watchful eyes turned toward her, so anxious that the rare advent of a caller should not excite her. Lottie was conscious, now as then, of an impatient feeling of mingled gratitude and irritation. Marion was so engrossed with that one idea! Though she had obviously recognized her caller she had done so with a single mind; there had been no run to the glass to be satisfied of her own appearance; only the absorbed solicitude for her sister!

Lottie wondered, with a faint disdain:

"Will she never have a lover?"

An Interlude

I

But whether Lottie's particular significance was to be attached to the fact or not, certain it is that Marion did pause before the mirror in the hall. And as she did so she stepped back into a past in which Lottie had practically no existence: a past which grouped itself almost entirely round the man whom she was about to meet and those relatives of his who had employed her, the firm of Preston & Son, bakers and confectioners, of Southbay.

Almost everything in life links itself to a tradition fair or foul. So, to Marion, had her own forbears; so had the Napiers; and now in turn the Prestons.

Mr. Preston, senior, had been a man of parts and impulses. His parts—acute business faculties—had enabled him to make two fortunes: his impulses had caused him to lose them. In the decline of his days he had espoused once more an early love and purchased what the family knew as a "dough" business. Southbay was young then, but young with a youth of amazing promise. The fruition of that promise earned a moderate fortune for George Preston, and he retired at seventy on a competency, which he died without risking. His youngest son,

George, succeeded to the business and some three years earlier had engaged Marion as shop assistant.

Marion hated the business. In fact, there would not appear much room for initiative in selling cakes and buns. Moreover, the hours were long and holidays scarce. Shop hours eight to eight daily, and eleven o'clock Saturdays, with one evening off each week at six. No Bank holidays, and only one week's holiday in the summer. Good Friday and Christmas day free; that is, if she cared to count as free a Good Friday which saw her at three in the morning just finishing the task of bun packing begun at nine o'clock the night before and, after three hours of sleepless rest, beginning again at six to start off the boys on their rounds until the last batch went out at nine.

But Prestons—the up-to-date shop of shining mahogany, gleaming mirrors, and shining brass and glassware, glittering with cleanliness and tempting of wares—had its tradition. Marion liked the tradition.

Every week railway delivery vans delivered at Preston's long flat wood crates marked "eggs, with care"; tubs labelled carelessly "pure butter"; consignments of dried fruit and sugars and jams. The latter were matters of course, except that Mrs. Preston, a dainty housekeeper, never hesitated to fill at the bakehouse stores her jam dishes for the table. But some experience of the trade had taught Marion that the crates of eggs and the tubs of butter were unique. Five hundred eggs were contained in each crate and from three to six crates

arrived weekly. They came from France—French eggs, but so promptly delivered and quickly consumed that they were delicious boiled or poached. The butter, too, was salt, but excellent sweet-flavoured butter, fit for household use.

Marion was used to the doctrine: "Any fool can make good bread from good flour; it takes a baker to make good bread from bad flour." She preferred to find herself in the employ of the fool.

George Preston gloried in his folly, as his father had done before him. He loved to feel that every cake and bun he supplied was what it pretended to be, and more—pure, nourishing, clean, and wholesome from raw material to shop window. This was the tradition. No straining after confections wonderful in colour, shape, and composition—particularly in composition; but straightforward English pastry cooking: light, crisp, and simple; bread appetizing to sight and smell and taste; cakes that proud housewives would fain claim to be "home made."

Then there were stories. One ran that on a certain wild and inclement day when a north wind drove a bitter sleet past Preston's and down the High Street to the sea, a carriage stopped opposite the shop door and after a wait the coachman descended to request the "shopwoman" to go out and take an order. Out went a reluctant girl to stand on the curb in the storm-swept street.

At the moment George Preston—the younger George—entered the shop from the bakehouse store. His glance—he was a silent man—took in the scene. He snatched coat and umbrella and

strode after his assistant, white with rage, to wrap round her the one and shelter her with the other. For a minute or two he stood, wind and sleet lashing his white apron round his legs in a drenched and flapping rag, while the lady within the carriage, having paused to bestow on him a momentary and stony stare, proceeded with her deliberate weighing of the respective merits of seed cake and Genoa.

Suddenly George's patience was exhausted. A look and word sent the assistant flying to the welcome shelter of the shop.

"*I* will take your order, madam," he said, "but I must ask you to be brief."

"But I prefer," said the outraged customer, "I *prefer* the young woman. She knows my needs. I insist——"

"And I prefer," said George Preston, quite evenly, "her health to your custom." He closed his umbrella. The lady called in a sharp voice: "Coachman, drive on."

II

Mrs. George Preston was pretty and young; with shining hair, not unlike Marion's, only longer, thicker, exceedingly fine and strong. She could robe herself in it, as in a shining garment reaching below her knees, no break or division occurring in its fine, shining splendour. A round baby face and gray eyes dancing under curling dark lashes belied one of the shrewdest business brains in Southbay. Marion liked Mrs. Preston; they were frequent companions: for the encroachments of the business

on the house room made it necessary that the two shop assistants should share with the mistress the household duties, since there was no accommodation left for a servant, nor room for them to have separate board; and this engendered an intimacy which in Marion's case was extended, through similarity of tastes and views, to a fair amount of companionship out of doors.

So it was that when, in the third year of Marion's stay with them, Mrs. Preston somewhat suddenly decided to undergo a long-talked-of operation, the management of the house, as well as of the shop and office, fell to Marion's share. The second assistant was her senior in years but junior in position and ability, as well as a comparative newcomer. Marion felt herself suddenly of tremendous use and importance.

She was up early, with a busy sense of things to be done, on the day arranged for Mrs. Preston's departure to a Nursing Home, but Mr. Preston was down before her, and had taken the letters into the breakfast room—the breakfast room being, in point of fact, general living room, sitting room, and office. It was none the less a well-ordered, comely room, and Marion followed her employer in, intent on preparing it for breakfast.

He was moodily staring at a letter and failed to respond to her "Good morning." But as she was passing him he put out his hand abstractedly, detaining her.

Marion waited.

"I've got a facer," he said, collecting himself.

"Mrs. Preston will be down in a minute. We didn't receive this letter till she'd gone—it came by the second post, mind. Run up to the bakehouse for some water as soon as you can, I want to speak to you."

He hurried off through the yard and up the brick stairs to the bakehouse before Marion had time to realize her amaze.

It was half an hour before she could find a need for hot water—the house drew its supplies from the bakehouse boilers—and climbed the slippery brick steps with her bucket. For Preston's was built on the steep slope of a hill, and had two distinct ground levels, the bakehouse being built on the higher, and conveniently abutting on a back street from whence the carts could load. When at last she did so, George Preston thrust the letter into her hand.

"There's the result of keeping a spare bedroom instead of having a maid in the house," said he.

Marion read:

DEAR ROSA,

I wonder if you can put me up for a week-end? I want breathing time to find good rooms for a long stay, and from 'phone replies Southbay seems pretty full. Don't worry if it's at all inconvenient. I can get a room of sorts at the Cecil.

I shall look in upon you about lunch time: train arriving 12:5.

We're all overworked here. I'm lucky enough to be ordered rest.

Yours affectionately,
JOHN.

"My brother," remarked George Preston, grimly. "Not a word to Rosa. It would worry her to death."

"But——" began Marion.

George Preston interrupted with a man's calm unreason.

"He hasn't been here for four years, so we're bound to do him well. You must get Mrs. What's-her-name to stay all day. I shall be back from the Nursing Home before he comes."

Marion closed her lips on the truth that Mrs. What's-her-name—the indispensable charwoman—couldn't stay, and closed them on every other protest. She felt oddly elate. Would Mr. John remember her? Would she recognize him?

III

The whole firm—as the employees were wont to term themselves, collectively—knew that Mr. John was coming before Mrs. Preston left the house at ten, but she left it in blissful ignorance. Her husband escorted her to the Home and left her with a promise to be back on the premises at the time of the operation at three; after which he turned his thoughts anxiously toward his brother's reception, and wished domestic excitements would not overlap.

During his absence the bakehouse, from foreman to errand-boy, had been reviving recollections or amassing information as to who and what Mr. John happened to be.

He was not the Member of Parliament—no, that was Mr. Robert, the eldest brother. Mr. John was the one that married the partner's daughter, and she drank, and that kept him back. He was the wealthiest, though; rather quiet; not so much push in him as in Robert. His wife was a terror; she——

The voices dropped and the speakers huddled together. Snatches of the gossip came down to the other assistant in the shop. Marion felt the talk going on. It at once excited and displeased her. She had known Mr. John so well!

So far she had made little of the fact to her employers, because Mr. George, it seemed, had not cared for Greyladies, had visited there only once, and spoke of Miss Frances merely as very old and frail. He had never heard of Margaret's Mead or Marion's uncle David; and the chances of her meeting his brother who had known both were so remote that Marion had dropped the subject. But that had not prevented her from learning all she could of him.

Mrs. Preston had given her his domestic history —in detail—more than once. She had dwelt on the squalor of a splendid house where no decent maids would stay and where those who did stay pandered to and fattened on the vice of its mistress. Cupboards stuffed with bottles; rooms degraded with the filth of beastly habits; faked trading accounts covering secretly obtained supplies; debts, and waste, and occasional horrible public scenes. These were the broad lines, with details a healthy

mind sickened over, and running through them the record of a man's vain shifts and expedients, taking the place of hope outworn and effort frustrated, to give to the outside of life at least a seemly and decent appearance.

But the story, as Marion heard it, never once gave to her view the man she remembered. When she last saw him fourteen years ago, at Greyladies, he had been but a short time married. Marion remembered his wife as an imposing figure, tall, large, lazy, and languid, with melting eyes and ripe lips; carelessly but handsomely dressed. She recalled him as young, prosperous, quiet but decided; resolute in speech and manner, with a low-toned voice and humorous mouth. To her he was a tease, but kind. He told her puzzling stories that left her dubious as to their deserving tears or laughter; he seemed very fond and proud of his wife, and Marion had been conscious of a petted child's vague jealousy.

She remembered some of his stories; she knew now that they were mostly meet for tears, the smile in them always a smile awry. And she pictured the grave teller watching her childish face for its detection of the comic, and merging its gravity into something very tender when he saw little-hoped-for perplexity chasing the smile away.

Then he would rise and say to Aunt Frances: "Mary grows up too soon." And his wife would reply, yawning: "Your tales are enough to make her. Why, I can't understand them!" And Marion would return to her book and he to his

wife's pleasure while the shadow of the tall elm crept across the sunny lawn.

IV

All lunch time—or dinner time, as Marion more correctly called it—John Preston's glance strayed perpetually to the tantalizingly familiar face. Where had he seen it? Had he caught George's introduction aright? Was she a relative of Rosa's and was it therefore a haunting resemblance to Rosa he was tracing in the sweet and serious face, as well as in the shining bright hair?

George Preston had quite forgotten Marion's mention of having met his brother, and noticed the latter's unconcealable interest with chuckling delight.

"John shall hear of this from me, presently," thought he. "I just wish Rosa was here!"

Marion, for her part, composed many little formal sentences which never reached her lips. For this, she found, was her Mr. John of Greyladies very little altered: only graver, older, and with a slightly cynical turn to the humour of his lips. He still looked strong and resolute and self-respecting—the last was the accented attribute, for under the infliction of such whips as she had heard of Marion had imagined that self-respect must fly. And she longed to speak to him; to extract the teasing malice from her employer's amused glances, yet those very glances kept her mute.

The ordeal of lunch was at last over. As a meal it had been, to Marion's relief, a distinct success.

She rose, wondering how she should clear the table if Mr. John held the door for her every time she came in—his sister-in-law would have disposed of him in one brief sentence. Then Mr. George came to her relief with:

"Come and have a cigar upstairs, old chap."

Marion looked up quickly, tension over. Mr. John caught the look, and with sudden pleased recognition said, quickly:

"You are Mary. Of course you are Mary: Mary, of Margaret's Mead."

He held out his hand; then, impulsively, both hands.

George said, deliberating: "So that's the story."

He was perhaps a trifle disappointed. It would have been a new sensation to catch John in a fault, intrigued by a shop assistant's pretty face. The true solution was prosaic enough! Yet at heart he was glad to retain his picture of his brother whole: relieved to know him still so singularly free from the temptations that might be imagined to wait on his married, unmarried state.

John had added to his greeting: "But perhaps you have forgotten Margaret's Mead?"

Marion answered, quickly: "Oh, no, nothing of it. You see, it was my childhood. There was nothing to remember in my London home."

John questioned, with raised brows: "Nothing to remember?"

"Not in the house," said Marion, misunderstanding, "nor in the district where we lived.

Rows of drab houses, utterly ugly and utterly monotonous."

"I know," said John, and smiled. "I remember drawing a description of it from you, before. Everything remembered, but nothing treasured?"

She caught the correction and flushed with pleasure. This was exactly her friend of old time. There was a passing allusion to her being busy now —they must have a talk later—as he followed his brother to the drawing room, where a fire was kindled in his honour.

V

When the brothers had sunk into chairs, one each side of the hearth, for it was chill March, John asked, ruminatively:

"And what do you make of little Mary?"

"Good business woman," George answered, briefly. "'Unexceptional references' kind of girl."

"That all?" asked John, laconically.

"As far as I'm concerned. Rosa makes a pal of her. Quite above the average of her class, of course. You know all that."

"Yes, I know that," replied John. He proffered his cigar case. "Aunt Frances was very fond of her. She comes of good stock."

George flashed round on him and John hastened to add:

"Yeoman stock, very sturdy and upright. A sort of aristocracy of character—not, so far as I know, the tag-end of old nobility. You're lucky to get her."

"So Rosa says."

"You speak as though you reserve judgment," said John, eyeing his brother curiously.

"Perhaps I do." The cigar was an excellent one and George Preston gave a long pause to a full appreciation of it. Then he went on as though its subtle stimulant made him garrulous.

"Most of the girls I've met—those we've had here—I've summed up pretty quickly, once for all. There's the girls who are on the look-out for evil and prepared to resent it, or laugh at it, or court it, as the case may be. There are the girls who don't look out for it—don't think of it—and avoid it or court it when it comes——"

John Preston interrupted ruminatively:

"I see. That point of view. And exactly what sort of evil do you think it politic to put in their way?"

George reddened, glancing at his brother suspiciously. Then his look cleared, he laughed frankly.

"None whatever, as you have guessed. But one likes to speculate, to experiment. A straw shows which way the wind blows. Now if I'm hurrying behind Miss Harland—— While I think of it, you mustn't call her Mary here."

"Noted," said his brother. "Go on with your instance."

"Well, if I'm behind her in the dark store and I just catch her arm and squeeze it—what does she do? When we get into the light is she flushed, or cross, or scornful, or flattered . . ." He gave a wave of his hand.

"Well," said John; "which is she?"

"Neither," said George, impressively. "Nothing at all. Not a tremor. As though I had dreamt that squeeze of her arm!" He looked resentful. "What can a man make of a girl like that?"

A smile hovered round John Preston's lips, but he repressed it. Instead he leant forward to the fire, knocking away the ash of his cigar, and after a moment asked, with quiet deliberation:

"It never strikes you, I suppose, as rather a blackguardly thing to do?"

George flushed warmly, but he laughed—a little forcedly.

"Hardly," he said, "or we'll suppose I shouldn't do it."

"It occurs to me," said John, "that even an average girl couldn't be quite her natural self—with her employer."

"Oh, hang it," said George. He looked genuinely disturbed. "As you put it——"

"Not at all," said his elder brother. "As, my dear fellow, you for the first time see it."

And then George laughed; not quite a nice laugh, for his brother caught him on the raw.

"Would you have seen it quite so soon," he suggested, "if the girl in question hadn't been Aunt Frances's little Mary?"

If John Preston hoped his brother would change his ways he was mistaken. Heedless, harmless, pleasure-loving George thought no more about it, secure in his warm heart and good intentions. So the day came when John witnessed the small

comedy—his brother running up the bakehouse stairs behind Marion, and catching her arm gently as he drew level with her.

John, glancing up from his paper in the breakfast room, saw how unmistakably that gentle grasp caressed. He got up leisurely, and leisurely climbed the steps behind them.

There was much noise and chatter in the bakehouse, and neither Marion nor George looked back. So John caught, momentarily, Marion's expression as his brother passed into the bakehouse, and she waited outside for what she had come to fetch.

No phlegmatic, unobservant face this; but vibrant, interested, faintly scornful rather than resentful. Nearly enough what John Preston had expected to see, yet surprising him slightly with the quality or fulness of its self-reliant poise. Marion's look might have meant that she was excellently entertained!

All this he caught in a breathing-space; in the next George brought to Marion the cake she had come for. John saw expressionless calm drop over the girl's features like a mask, and he saw his brother's eyes—half-amused, half-resentful—scan the mask.

Then George's glance fell on his brother sauntering toward him, and Marion looked up. She passed him, smiling, and ran downstairs on her errand, suddenly humming a gay tune.

VI

It was when his interest had progressed so far, to the point of adventures and discoveries, that John

Preston fell ill. On the manner of his falling ill Marion always looked back with mingled feelings, compound of the desire to laugh and the wish to admire.

The bakehouse steps have been described with intent. Marion hated them. In dry weather they were uneven and steep, in wet so slimy and slippery as to constitute a snare. More than once a score of warm cakes had scattered themselves in fragrant fragments over the brick yard, while a hapless baker cursed his luck and feelingly rubbed his shins. Marion had sprained her ankle in a too-swift descent and slopped more pails of water than she could remember.

John Preston hated to see the girls adventuring, laden, down the slippery steps—especially Marion, who seemed to have forgotten the way to move slowly and tripped down at an obviously hazardous rate. On this particular occasion he was in the bakehouse, talking to his brother, when she arrived with her bucket for hot water.

She kept her face studiously turned from him while the foreman filled it and left with a gay "Thank you, Linton," hoping that so she would escape Mr. Preston's notice and his half-absent-minded, half-instinctive attentions.

But she did not, for he drew his conversation to a close as she left the bakehouse and arrived at the top of the stairs before her to say, in his quiet, unevadable way:

"Allow me."

Marion surrendered her bucket perforce, but

more annoyed than grateful. She paused behind him with an impatient tap of her foot and bite of her lip, feeling that his action was quixotic and not really commendable on the score of either tact or sense. Since bucket-carrying was incidental to her means of earning a living, buckets she must carry! The point of view appealed to John Preston when he had gone down three steps, and he turned to her with a laughing remark intended to carry off the—perhaps pardonable—stupidity of his action.

As it happened it carried off much more. He forgot entirely the uncertain ground under his feet and took the remainder of the flight of stairs at one step. Marion, watching the catastrophe, was paralyzed between instinctive laughter and blank dismay—quite ludicrous dismay at so much dignity overthrown and a sense of her sheer inability to rise to the occasion.

With a very red face she watched her knight-errant pick himself up, and then ran nimbly down the steps as though she had just perceived that he had—let us say—stumbled.

She asked him, with heroic gravity:

"Are you hurt?"

He laughed. "The mischief is I have thrown away your water," he replied, shaking himself. "Hurt? No, of course not. All the same, these steps are—murderous!"

"You are bound to be badly shaken," Marion said. She was smiling frankly now as she brought a towel for the wiping-down process. He shrugged his shoulders.

"George shall pay for this," he said. "No peace for him till those steps are concreted. Thanks. Oh, don't trouble. Now for the water."

"Oh, no, please not," said Marion. "I don't really want it. There's no time now before lunch."

She was agreeably surprised that he conceded the point, and, finding the clock on the stroke of one, went straight into the breakfast room to await his brother. But as the meal proceeded her surprise changed its quality. She observed that Mr. John played with his food, crumbling his bread and tasting little; that he accepted Burgundy and drank it at a draught, which was not his habit; that his remarks were infrequent and replies absent.

There was a jest about his fall, of course: not too sustained, because Marion quickly changed the subject. By the time lunch was over she was genuinely uneasy. In her housewifely capacity she laid tentative fingers on Mr. John's sleeve.

"Your coat is wet through," she remarked then, hastily. "I am sure you ought to change it at once."

"What's that?" said George, looking up. "Did you get the water over you, then?"

"A veritable Jordan," replied his brother. "The doctrine of complete immersion—a Baptist business." Then he answered Marion's anxious glance. "I will, Miss Harland, to relieve you. At once."

As he went upstairs Marion said to Mr. George, with a worried air:

"I wish you would make sure that he is not hurt."

"Hurt!" echoed George Preston, pausing in-

credulously in the act of lighting a cigarette. "How could he be hurt?"

Marion answered, annoyed: "Very easily. And I'm sure he is. He has eaten nothing."

George Preston looked exasperated. The brick steps were a constant bone of contention. He knew they were dangerous; he knew he ought to have them seen to. But then on the slightest provocation to be irritated with remarks like this . . . it would try the patience of a saint! He turned to go back to his bakehouse, throwing his cigarette away in his disgust.

Marion remarked:

"I hear Mr. John calling you, sir."

He looked at her sharply. It was not in the convention that she should call him "sir" and he suspected temper. But as the call came more imperiously he put Marion from his thoughts and ran upstairs.

Marion had not been mistaken in thinking that toward the end of the meal Mr. John had shivered as with fever, but she had been at sea as to the cause, concluding he had taken cold. When George ran, still irritable, into his brother's room, he was confronted with a sight that turned him faint.

Mr. John extended a bared arm to him. He was shivering now, obviously: his face looked blue and shrivelled and his voice had a shrewish note.

"What can we do for this," he said, "it's a scald. When I took off my sleeve the infernal skin came with it."

"Why the world——" began George, and stopped. The conviction rushed on him that this was a serious matter. He called down to Marion, with a note of panic in his voice, to send old Linton up with remedies and sickened to find the extent of the surface injury as he helped to rip away his brother's clothes.

"I didn't think the water was hot enough," was all John remarked further. The sense of illness grew on him as he submitted, childlike, to old Linton's simple bakehouse remedy, a compress of creamy slaked yeast. But Linton whispered to his master, outside the door:

"The burn's over too big an area, sir. I should 'phone for a doctor. This is a doctor's job."

And George did 'phone without delay. But whether shock was responsible, or whether it was a natural sequence to the nervous exhaustion that had brought him to Southbay, or a combination of the two, certain it is that pneumonia held John Preston at death grips before the dawn of the next day.

VII

When threatening Death follows close in the wake of an accident that was first simply ludicrous and then trifling, it is apt by force of sharp contrast to gain a portentous tragic air. This was the case at Preston's. Accounts of the incident, glimpsed by some and fully witnessed by others, had run up and down the house to the accompaniment of ripples of mirth during the hour of the victim's self-impatient silence. And when at the end of

that time half-incredulous fear took the place of mirth, recent lightheartedness seemed to act as a sharp irritant to the nerves.

Especially was this true of Marion, who imagined herself to have penetrated below the quiet, but kind and courteous, exterior which won John Preston liking everywhere, to a depth and ripeness of nature that others dreamt not of; and, besides, to her own personal, intimate niche in his regard.

It annoyed her that an hour ago she could have been amused, convulsed with laughter, over an accident that had its root in a simple act of courtesy to herself, and that now assumed an aspect so menacing. For the time being all sense of humour and proportion left her. That so wretched an accident should lay at peril this valuable life!

Such became the burden of her cry, and not of hers alone. George Preston worshipped the sane, cool judgment that in his sage brother was linked to so wide and easy a tolerance. Or, at least, he worshipped it now. Should John recover he would state his admiration, even to himself, in other terms. But for the present he must measure and remeasure, still with an incredulity of horror, the extent of his possible loss.

In his panic he sent out messages for a hasty gathering of the clans, Edward from Liverpool, his father from Swindon, little Dorothea, John's only child, from school at Scarborough. Marion, always in his confidence and always his right hand, with difficulty kept herself from sharing his affright.

Four days, five days passed of breathless arrivals,

whispering voices, nurses, doctors, taxis, telephones, and telegrams. Prestons of all sorts, sizes, and descriptions seemed for ever arriving and departing; pompous Prestons, modest Prestons, fat, lean, silent, or wheezy Prestons: Prestons who accepted Marion simply and treated her with friendship; Prestons who ignored her; Prestons who imagined her their servant. But all with an air of solemnity and importance and a tendency to talk in lowered tones.

Marion, moving quiet and capable among them, from their treatment of her drew her silent inference as to their character; feeling, beneath her look of occupied reserve, each minute difference of tone and look and word as an assault upon her nerves, which responded, shocked, quivering, vibrant, to pleasure or hurt.

Not least did they respond, fretted and indignant, to the consciousness that to the major part of this prosperous, moneyed family of many ramifications death was an exciting as well as an important event.

The John Preston she knew and over whose labouring vitality these strangers spent their whispering eloquence, with conjectures and prophecies and confidences, seemed so aloof from all the pompous ferment, fighting disease in the quiet room where nurses stepped softly, aiding the battle with businesslike fingers and tepid sponges. Between the comedy and tragedy of it Marion's nerves wore thin; she caught herself wishing that she could spirit Mr. John away—say to be nursed back to life by Miss Frances at quiet Greyladies.

But at last the day came when twelve-year-old Dorothea was allowed to see her father. She came back to Marion subdued, and rather frightened, the grim reality of illness impressing her for the first time: "He is so thin, so old; I am sure I mustn't go back to school till he is better. Do you really think he will get well?" She appealed with soft sweet eyes swimming in tears: Marion loved her for the tears: she had thought the vain, gay, chattering child quite heartless. But now she kissed her, and Dorothea prettily permitted herself to be kissed and comforted. She was really a soft-hearted child; not warm-hearted; a very different matter. And Marion added to her own perplexities then and thereafter through failure to make that rather nice distinction.

VIII

When Mrs. Preston returned from the Nursing Home she proceeded suavely, with a kind and practical woman's strange blindness, to throw her brother-in-law and Marion together. John had reached years of discretion; he was married; moreover, he was both preëminently sane and a gentleman. And Marion . . . Marion was her friend; she was also her assistant! Marion was pretty; yes, admitted and admitted proudly. But not only was Marion a proud and sensible girl, but she was also—also—not attractive to men; not attractive in that way. Mrs. Preston had more than once remarked this fact to her husband as really quite peculiar, seeing Marion was so pretty,

and George Preston had mumblingly assented, thanking kind heaven for a shrewd woman's folly. Still he conceded that he found Marion cold.

Mrs. Preston, be it said, never even to herself stated a case about her brother-in-law and Marion. The idea never occurred to her. But so she certainly would have stated it had an outsider suggested to her a doubt. As for Marion, her view of John Preston so far coincided with that of her friend. To her also he was married and a gentleman, though Marion would have stated it as married and good. Unfortunately for Marion, her conception of goodness eliminated the man.

John Preston was frankly pleased. Marion stimulated him; her beauty charmed and her intelligence intrigued him. When Rosa said that Miss Harland had had too much responsibility, was on the verge of a breakdown, and must therefore turn from businesss to the domestic side of life, he sedulously agreed with her. For he found that this dictum threw upon Marion the meticulous dusting of the thousand and one trifles in the banal drawing room in which he spent his convalescent days; it sent her up to him with trays, with papers, with letters; it exonerated him from blame if he detained her in talk and argument.

It was during those weeks of John's convalescence that the scheme of a South Coast A.B.C. was hatched. George Preston had made up his mind to retire from business early; the fact that one or two businesses in near towns came simultaneously into the market gave his ideas a trend; and

John was opportunely at hand for discussion and advice.

Rosa was too shrewdly interested to be left out of the discussion, and Rosa's talkative friendship brought in Marion. Marion's very ignorance stood her in good stead for, allied as it was to an intelligence far above the average, it caused her to ask the most pertinent questions. There was formed a keen and eager council of four, at first never meeting as such. Rosa discussed the question with Marion as it affected herself, with absolute unreserve, proud of her knowledge and acumen and possessions; George discussed it with her grumpily, simply hoping that the girl might be tempted by his confidence to a warmer view of him; John discussed it with her because he had a very calm appreciation of the value of an outside point of view; and, latterly because he wished to find a niche for Marion in it. But each of the trio discussed it with her separately, almost unaware that the others did so, too.

John Preston hated waste and he saw Marion's abilities as wasted absolutely. Trivial things had given her to his views as possessed of method, will, energy, and, above all, initiative. He saw that she preferred to do things differently from other people and that it was a positive necessity to her that she should do them better. Order she delighted in; her one failing—and a grave one—was a dislike of deputing any one of her jobs to another. She had yet to learn the art of setting herself free for that hardest task of organizing calmly and efficiently while others do the work.

Marion earned £16 a year and her laundry and keep. On the face of things she was worse off than a servant—worse off than many of her fellows. But she had advantages. Some were comprised in the things that spelt "Preston's" to her, some consisted in a definite and specific comfort of living and habitation, and some in opportunity. John Preston took it into his head to enlarge to her upon her opportunities and, in doing so, to amplify them. Without seeming to teach, he assiduously taught her, and Marion learned very fast.

For the first time in his life he became aware of the paucity of the opportunities open to women; the meanness of their emoluments, the few paths to success. Marion, and women like Marion, might be a clerk, a teacher, a shop assistant, a nurse, or—a tradeswoman. He ran over the possibilities of the vocations and paused over the last. As a clerk she might, if she were very lucky, earn ninety pounds a year—he had heard of rare women holding secretarial engagements at £150. As teacher she might reach that figure, but Marion was too old to train as a teacher; as a shop assistant, if she became a buyer or manageress, she might, with great luck, earn £100 a year and her keep; as a nurse somewhere about the same figure. But for all her exceptional abilities, the possibilities were that Marion, left unassisted and unadvised, would continue to accept a tolerably congenial post at the nominal salary she got now. He knew the sort of thing that in the large business houses would retard and repel her. But he said to himself that she must

desire the big things, that he must teach her, that she must not settle down to drudgery and £20 a year for ever. She must become a manageress—why not of a branch of the South Coast A.B.C.—why not of this branch, which she had practically managed already? Why not eventually, with the help of directors and auditors, organizing secretary, with an assured position, and an increasing salary? Why not, at long last, proprietress? She was ridiculously capable; and she was Aunt Frances's pet and protégée—little Mary of Margaret's Mead.

Did it occur to him that she might marry? If so, doubtless he smiled sagely, but sadly, leaving that event to make way for itself.

IX

Not all at once did John Preston reach his conclusions, nor when he had, did he confide them to his brother and Rosa, nor even to Marion. Instead he set himself to work to do much by suggestion; so skilfully, that it was Rosa and no other who first saw in Marion an ideal manageress for the Southbay branch of the A.B.C.

John demurred; she was not old enough: her experience too limited. Rosa was exasperated with his prejudiced and finicking objections; even George was roused to slow protest. And, as John had quietly foreseen, the project commended itself to Rosa as a means whereby she need not at once lose actual touch with the happenings in the business she had helped to build. For as the weeks of John's long, slow convalescence slipped by, the

South Coast A.B.C. tended to become ever more and more of a reality and less of a dream.

As John also foresaw, Rosa could not keep to herself this side issue, of so much moment to Marion. She was deeply excited about it; very soon Marion was deeply excited, too, and then John Preston began to reap his reward. Marion at last became openly one of the circle of four. The animated discussions of schemes and projects were thrown open to her. A very intimate circle it tended to become.

What a pleasure it had for him, the seemingly dry man of business, to whom business had never ceased to be an adventure and a delight! To watch the young mind, with all the expansiveness and enthusiasm of youth, opening eagerly to the new impressions. Grasping the meaning and power of capital, its uses and sane employment; the place of labour, the use and abuse of advertisement; the waste of thriftless saving, and the economy of lavish expenditure. Then to think in terms of thousands of pounds—she who had thought in units; and suddenly to be brought back again to calculations involving the fraction of a penny. Phrases like "site values," "commission on sales or profits," "dividends," and "issues of stock" floated through her dreams and became familiar to her waking thoughts. She seemed like a sponge, absorbing commercial facts at every pore; but, unlike a sponge, remaining unfilled and undistended.

In May, a fortnight after John Preston's return to London, Marion left Southbay on his advice to

learn something of the working of company's shops at a branch in Aldwich. By then the South Coast A.B.C. was well on the way to becoming an accomplished fact: the near businesses had been bought and the first legal steps taken. She had been at Aldwich seven weeks when Lottie's letter summoned her to Margaret's Mead.

To Pensive Eve

I

Preston's was present to Marion as she made her brief pause in the hall—a conglomeration of pictures in which the man she was about to meet figured largely. Then she opened the oak-room door and closed it behind her, and suddenly the things John Preston represented flooded her mind to the exclusion of all besides.

He came toward her with outstretched hand of greeting—a tall, erect, distinguished-looking man in well-cut gray flannels. Instantly his mental image was restamped upon Marion's brain with precision. She recognized anew all the things in his appearance she had valued; and she knew they were precisely the things she missed in Lottie's men.

It was not the clothes, nor the well-tended hands, nor even the ease of manner that she cared for, surely, but it was what these things stood for. They were allied in her eyes to the taste and refinement and culture of the mind that chose them. In the next moment she had done with sophistries and acknowledged to herself, honestly, that even for themselves she liked them. And swiftly, on a new viewpoint, when their owner began to speak, she declared inwardly that they were less than

nothing—that she must have liked the speaker, for the mere quality of his voice, had she been blind.

Of such things—values, readjustments, appreciations—the interview to Marion mainly consisted, underlying and overwhelming the spoken word; words which afterward she recalled hungrily, and rejoiced to find memory had stored for her.

While John Preston spoke of the beauty of the old and gracious room: the blue light given back by the oak panels; their age and date, and the more recent carving—embellishing conjecture with anecdote and legend—Marion was gloating over the richness of this addition to the pattern of her life at Margaret's Mead. How starved she had been that an accent, an inflection of voice, a point of view, could seem a feast so rich!

Then that curious inner voice began to tell her, swiftly, that just so had places and things been enriched for her, she all unwitting, at Southbay. The glamour and romance of trade, had it existed for her before John Preston came? Had it not been, indeed, his mere handling of it that had given it back to her, informed with adventure and with life? Had he not made her abilities real to her, her career to matter to her, her self infinitely more self-respecting and self-assured?

So now, as indeed she had known he would, he gave this dear house, this mellow room back to her exploited but enriched. The delight it had for her examined, explained, and rendered a thousand times more real. Her heart expanded in silent gratitude and gladness.

The interview was really brief. Miss Frances, it seemed, had heard with dismay of Lottie's illness—Walter Napier's under-carter lived in a cottage near Greyladies—and realized with yet more dismay how hardly her failure to identify Lottie might have been judged by her neighbours. So she made her nephew her envoy and he explained the matter to Marion; Marion, who seemed to answer so understandingly and whose mind was actually concerned with matters so different.

And of what, to John Preston, did his call consist? Of a very real appreciation of a mellow room in oak, fitly shrined in a long-loved house of artistic gable ends? Of an instinctive longing to consign to a dust heap the plush and bamboo of Lottie's bric-à-brac? Of an appreciation of Marion's girlish grace in the farmhouse setting?

It consisted of none of these, though all were there. It consisted in an unreasoning pleasure in the quality of their greeting; a mutual instinctive gladness of lip and eye. It consisted of a troubled backward glance to the days of Marion's childhood: of chidden hope and rebellious strong desire. He saw the girl painfully, feeling he dare not see her, and through that mist of pain saw her the more clearly.

Absence and enforced idleness and insane, pleased retrospection had done this for him, he thought. A madness of brain and sense that contact and friendly intimacy would dispel. Open air, the sweet serenity of his aunt, the gracious calm of Greyladies, here were atmospheres to quell a rising

passion in. An intimate, sweet friendship—this Fate offered him. And when they parted Marion's hand would rest again in his!

So variously, he argued, and kept his speech cool, and maintained his attitude of friendly adviser and well-wisher. Spoke of Aldwich, and Marion's unforeseen experiences there; claimed a full account of them at their next meeting.

"And when are you coming?" he asked, on the point of departure.

Marion considered; thought possibly to-morrow; promised as much if Lottie were no worse.

"I am still sorry," said John Preston, "that you had to leave Aldwich."

"But I had to. You see I had to?" Marion questioned, eagerly.

"I see how you look at it," he replied. "And, of course, for my own sake, I am glad. You see I am making a long stay here. But I think you may be wrong."

He smiled at Marion's negative headshake as he said good-bye; receiving, in the manner he had known he should receive, the anticipated clasp of her hand.

II

Marion went slowly upstairs with her mind full of the questions raised by John Preston's last sentences and his rather sad and disillusioned smile. It is true she hugged also her vision of him, rejoicing in the advent of someone who cared for her enough to wish to understand her; who saw her as an

individual, and not as an adjunct to Lottie; someone, also, whom she could respect and understand. But in the main she was concerned with his last sentences. Had she acted wisely in answering Lottie's call and coming to Margaret's Mead?

She did not know. She knew that she had imagined her duty clear—her duty to her sick sister and small nephew and niece. But was it true that sacrifice is nearly always made in vain? Had she really added anything essential to Lottie's happiness or to the well-being of Bobbie and Clare? On the other hand, had she made a real sacrifice? Or had she first and always pleased herself?

In asking the question she had no mind to lose herself in vain conjectures as to the mainspring of all action. It might or might not be true that morals are based solely on selfishness and that her action in coming to Lottie, even at personal disadvantage, might be for no better reason than that personal disadvantage gave her less pain than the thought of Lottie's disappointment. She knew all this was arguable, and dismissed it. What she questioned was whether Lottie's wish or her own inclination had weighed the more with her. Had it been the lure of duty? Or was it rather the lure of memory? The lure of a gabled house backgrounded in trees; of a smiling garden, of a place peopled with memories, eloquent with sounds and fragrances of a vividly remembered past? Or was it that she was after all stunned with the jar and conflict of commerce; unnerved by a heroic attempt to master it on too many sides at once? Had John

Preston's stimulus overstepped the mark of her young ambition?

"I think I was rather tired," thought Marion. "At any rate, I know I was glad to come."

III

Lottie's eyes sought hers languidly when she entered the bedroom and, as soon as Kate had disappeared, she asked casually:

"What is he like, Marion?"

"Like?" repeated Marion. She crossed the room and sat down by the bedside. "I thought you were asleep."

"No. He must be almost middle aged, mustn't he? I have a sort of idea he was grown up, when I was in my 'teens."

"Mr. Preston? He is thirty-eight," replied Marion, concisely. "He came with a message of apology from Miss Frances, Lottie."

"To you?" asked Lottie, with a careful accent of mild interest.

Marion replied, "No, to you, dear." She had a sensation of sickening fear. Was there to be another outburst of senseless jealousy and temper, with its dread result?

But Lottie's feelings were not deeply concerned here. She merely said:

"Oh, to me. I was too insignificant, I suppose, to be remembered for myself."

Marion answered, with the guile of a serpent:

"You never gave them the opportunity of knowing you; how you used to hate Greyladies!"

"And should still," replied Lottie, cheerfully. "I have no use for superior people. That's why I married Will."

Marion asked, rather anxiously:

"Do you feel well enough to talk?"

"I shall be really ill if I don't. Oh, I'll be ever so careful. I suppose, Mary, a man like this Mr. John would just suit you; someone who'd talk miles over one's head all the time and have to be worshipped at a respectful distance."

Marion answered, sedately. "You have forgotten he's married."

"Married?" echoed Lottie, disgustedly. "Oh, of course. I was imagining him a widower. He's the one with the wife who drinks. What is she like, Marion? Have you seen her?"

To amuse Lottie, Marion went fully into the story, feeding her with details that may not be set down here. She paused now and again, hoping for respite, but always Lottie met the pause with a lazy, contented: "Go on."

"He should get a separation," she said at last. "I would not live with such a beast."

"Oh," said Marion, rather wearily, "they have not lived together for a long time—years, I think."

"And separations are ridiculous, too," continued Lottie. "The only sensible thing is divorce."

"I don't see that," Marion answered her.

Lottie stared at her. Then she smiled—the rather mocking smile she often had for Marion.

"Don't you?" she said. "I suppose you think divorce immoral. It doesn't occur to you that it's

immoral to chain two people together who have ceased to part a shred of affection between them."

"I wouldn't chain them together," said Marion. "I believe in separation."

"I don't," said Lottie. "It's negative. Life is positive and the things that make for life. Not to be hurt—that's your negative position. To love and enjoy—that's mine, positive."

"I don't agree," said Marion. "But then, though I believe in divorce, I don't believe in marriage after divorce."

Again Lottie stared at her.

"What in the world do you think divorce is for?" she asked.

"It's an assertion of honour," replied Marion, her head high. "It's—why, Lottie, no good man or woman could contemplate marrying again while the one they had married before was still alive. Imagine being married to a man and seeing him meet the man who had been your husband first!"

"Well," said Lottie. "It would be—possibly—uncomfortable."

"Uncomfortable?" echoed Marion. "People with memories! It's unthinkable!"

Lottie watched her ironically. "And you suppose," she said, the faintest inflection of pity in her voice, "that a man—your good man—would look at things in that light?"

"I do," said Marion. She spoke as though faith made facts.

"Mary, my dear," said Lottie, her voice tranquil

but exhausted, "I dare not laugh, though I want to. Instead, I've got to speak or I shall burst. You're a fool."

IV

As daylight faded the fact of illness and catastrophe reasserted itself at Margaret's Mead. Will came in from the fields early and betook himself upstairs to his wife, first exasperating Marion by stripping off his coat in the kitchen to wash noisily at the sink. She guessed that he did so to avoid making a clatter in his room next to Lottie's, who might be sleeping. But she wondered angrily why he could not use the bathroom; why he did not make a habit—as Walter did—of an evening bath after his day's work about the farm.

Then she helped Phyllis get the children quietly to bed, a matter calling for diplomacy. For Lottie seemed alarmingly exhausted, complaining of the heat even as the day waned into an evening singularly pure, sweet, and cool. Perhaps it was the unusual freshness that kept the children joyous and buoyant, so that Marion's nerves were frayed more in the endeavour to still their laughter than if the need had been to soothe fretful tears.

But at last the babies slept. The sounds out of doors altered in quality and kind—so numerous, yet so distinct from the busy sounds of day—and the shadows in the low oak room deepened. The fragrance of field and garden stole gently into the house through the widely open windows—the house so designedly quiet and still! Everything within it

seemed to remind its inmates of how different all would have been had the mistress not been ill.

In such things lies the pain of illness for those who look on. The new, strange, heavy aspect taken by commonplace things; an aching desolateness, born of comparison. Marion found her hurt deepened, rather than healed, by the logical reflection that for this, indeed, she had come to Margaret's Mead; that but for the expectation of it she would not have been there.

Even the garden soon became too pensively sweet for walking in alone, and Marion's thoughts turned instinctively to the bright-lit dining room, where Walter wrestled with his accounts. She believed him to be a bungler and felt sure that she could help him. Lottie, in one of her match-making moments, had suggested as much. Marion had disdained to offer aid then, but in her restless depression she craved some such occupation now.

In the silent house the idea soon became an obsession: To be busy in some mind-absorbing way with facts concerned with life, and so cheat the creeping thoughts of death that sought to wind themselves about her. How dead she felt already! How dim and far away seemed the morning's encounter with Walter, Lottie's ill-starred vehemence, the dinner hour, compound of anger and pleasure, the resurrection—now seeming so remote as to be dreamlike—of her Southbay life and its intimacy with Mr. John.

Fear of her mood and the hour drove her. She crossed the hall and opened the dining-room door.

The table was bespread with account books but Walter was seated at his bureau. She said to him:

"I am rather miserable. Can you give me something to do?"

V

When at her words he turned toward her, her heart sank. What had possessed her that she should intrude upon this man? Walter had evidently not been working. As he turned his face to her it was all marked with bars and dents of white where he had held it sunk between his strong, lean fingers. But besides these marks, so soon effaced, there were strange workings and convulsions of feature, wild gleams in his red and angry glance, so fiercely resentful of intrusion. Marion knew him to be a bigoted and fanatical abstainer or she would have thought he had been drinking.

Oddly enough, this was not all from which she shrank back with distaste. Though she fancied his shaken soul naked before her she must pause over such unworthy details as his tasteless clothes, his meanness of stature, his ugly hands—all appearing suddenly exaggerated into something positively and actively obnoxious. While, as if to affront her, the physical attributes and sex of the man seemed to shout at her in the still and silent room. She thought, with amazement, that she must have begun to get used to him until she again saw Mr. John!

He asked, briefly: "Did you want me?"

She perceived he had not heard what she said

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and sought desperately in her mind for something that would take her, at once and unanswered, out of the room. But nothing presented itself, and she repeated her former sentence, tonelessly, feeling her mind quite blank.

He heard her apparently unsurprised, and Marion saw, with a sort of unwilling fascination, his features settle into their usual aggressive and dogged lines, as a wrestling tree falls into stillness when the wind drops. Agitation passed him by. He answered in the most casual, emotionless voice:

"There's a lot of work wants doing in the wages' book."

With the words he got up and crossed to the table and, with a sigh of relief, Marion went there, too. He opened a book and drew his finger down the columns. He remarked:

"You see it wants extending and totalling."

Marion found herself looking at a neatly kept and business-like account. After a moment's scrutiny she put out a hand to turn back a leaf, saying:

"Nothing has been brought forward."

Walter said "No," but kept his hand so awkwardly in its place that Marion's must touch it. Instinctively she sped a quick glance to his face, ripe for resentment. She met a look steadfast and impassive as that of a sphinx. Yet the momentary contact had sent her blood rushing back upon her. Her brain clamoured, resentfully:

"He will work close beside you, and you will not lose consciousness of his presence for one moment of the time."

Walter sank into the chair next to hers. He said:

"Would you mind calling over these entries?" He pointed out which. "My disbursement book is not folioed. That's why I left them. What is yours? Thanks."

She began calling over.

VI

As a matter of fact, Marion's entrance had seemed the most apt and pertinent conclusion to Walter Napier's long reverie. Sitting there in angry, grief-stricken solitude, he had been reading, page by page, the history of his ill-starred passion for Lottie. He saw her in the long bygone years, a wild, laughing, mocking slip of a girl, at once romp and prude, escaping from the quietude of life at Margaret's Mead, glad to encounter him and his brother, to tease and flout them with mingled challenges and compliments and gibes.

Lottie had brought with her a subtle something—a difference of speech and accent, a graceful erectness of carriage, a careless confidence in dress—that had marked her out for the young, ambitious man from the girls he had so far met. And then she came from Margaret's Mead where, as he well knew, a more dignified and ordered life was led than any he had known: whose inmates passed him by with the affable but careless nod of undoubting and undoubted superiority.

Lottie condescended to them, and in his pride he alternately welcomed and rebuffed her; welcoming

what she was, and rebuffing her for the things and people who claimed her. Lottie, in the delicate grace of her slim girlhood, with her laughing gray-green eyes, her sharp tongue, her mischief, her wit and raillery! Ah, he had loved her then! Loved her the more for the quick, daring kisses she had received so coolly.

Lottie at her wildest had been always cool, ready to dance out of his life as gaily as she had danced into it. Too lazy, in the quick thereafter, to answer his letters; too lazy even to let him know of her change of address. And so the years slipped by and the choice that kept him at home and led Will to wander gave her at last to the weaker brother.

He recalled how Will had written home:

I am bringing my girl home, mother. Tell Walter it's Lottie Harland; he'll remember her; we used to have larks together years ago when she stayed at Margaret's Mead.

"My girl!" Walter Napier had scorned the expression, scorned the letter and the writer. Will's writing was bad, his spelling not even phonetic, but resembling no known usage. All of which had not altered the fact that he had secured Lottie. A different Lottie, the older Walter opined, from the Lottie of Margaret's Mead.

But she had proved no different, and Walter had kissed her again, and again she had taken his kisses coolly. She had taken his kisses coolly, though they were different kisses, and she was engaged to

his brother! Yet curiously, oddly, Walter had known that she remained true to Will; believed, none the less fiercely resenting it, that Will knew of and laughed at his kisses, in fond and conscious pride of possession. And knew and believed these things in spite of believing, also, that he, Walter, more truly possessed her.

And it was true. Lottie knew she loved Walter as she did not love Will, but she was afraid of her loving. It was too much, too exciting, too stimulating, too encroaching! She declined on her mild affection for Will as on a haven of rest and security. Passion for Walter was too wild a sea for her to embark upon.

So, reasonably and calculatingly, she remained true to her plighted troth: believing, indeed, that she did rightly. She had given her word, and she loved Will, quietly but steadfastly. He demanded nothing of her that she could not give. But Walter's more restless brain and over-masterful passion—that would want living up to, she foresaw. Lottie was carelessly and gaily casual. She felt herself not strong enough for the heroic rôle. Besides, if she married Will she would keep both brothers. Walter would never forget her and always respect her—she could see to that. Whereas if she took Walter, Will, after a long spell of sullen jealousy and rage, would eventually forget her: conceivably marry. So she kept them both.

All this Walter knew and recalled. He recalled the occasions when he had kissed her, the once only that she had kissed him. He recalled all that she

had meant to him—how, in spite of his clear-sightedness in regard to her, she had remained for him above all women desirable and dear.

Above all women desirable and dear! And yet, if all love holds its alloy of hate, how near to hatred unalloyed was Walter's starved, unquiet passion? Only, so far, he had yet to meet the woman whose image would obliterate hers. Would Marion's? Could Marion's?

For at last he was losing her—utterly, irretrievably; as he never yet had lost her. She, moreover, gaily and cheerfully offering something in her stead, while she gave her last kisses to his brother.

He paused in his reverie and, silently and deliberately, holding his breath, let his picture of Lottie be replaced by Marion. Something of Lottie the new fair face held; something of her mockery, a faint reflex of her spirit, and all and more of the subtle superiority that had first—in far back days of early youth—attracted and fired him.

He held his breath. In a grim spasm of revolt and energy he muttered: "I'll take Marion!"

And so, pertinently, Marion entered the room.

VII

He faced her, resentful of intrusion, yet none the less his latest thought held him strongly enough to make him school both features and voice to a semblance of calm. Moreover, Marion's face again arrested him with its likeness to Lottie's. She was worn out by the rapid passage of events and sensation, and the careworn hollowness of cheek and

eye accentuated the family likeness invariably existing between sisters. The hand she had laid upon the open account book might have been Lottie's before Lottie became ill. Deliberately Napier sought contact with it; deliberately sensed the girl's thrill and resentment and grimly exulted in the impassivity which masked his own.

Now he sat near her; so close that leaning back slightly in his chair as she leant forward he could watch with stolen sidelong glances the pulses in her throat and the stir of her blouse under her breathing; even catch, by slight manœuvring, the faintest suggestion of curve toward her bosom's rounded perfection. He was sensualist enough to do that; man enough to despise himself for the meanness of his spying.

When, at last, after an hour's quiet work, Marion leant back from her task with a sigh and the soft blouse fell into its wonted place, giving only the sharply defined and modest V of the open neck to view, Napier closed his lips on a sharp sigh. His senses were awake and his pulses throbbing. As a fact, he was drunk with the pain of the fear of Lottie's loss.

He said to Marion, curtly: "You like bookkeeping. What do you think of my system?"

"I don't think I've grasped it as a system," Marion replied, truthfully. Her eye wandered over the books strewed about the table. "Farm accounts are a new proposition to me. You will have to give me the headings for me to know."

Walter reached for and opened one book after

another, briefly naming the accounts they represented. For a few minutes Marion was held interested and surprised. Why had she imagined that so acute a brain as Walter's would bungle his accounts? And he was a neat penman. She revised her view of him.

"What is the untidy looking book?" she asked, at last, having found nothing in Walter's to condemn.

He reached for and gave it to her without a word. Opening it she flushed as she recognized Will's hopeless writing and more hopeless figures. Then she saw everywhere Walter's neat corrections and emendations. After an awkward pause she remarked, with an attempt at casualness:

"This is just a day-book dealing only with cattle."

"Will is a cattle dealer," returned Walter. "I thought you knew that. He believes in simplicity. You'll find his payments and receipts all in the one column. Then he dissects it into monthly totals at the end of the book."

As Marion turned to the last few untidy pages he pushed back his chair. "Now you know all about us," he said, with a grim smile. "That's Will's bit on his own, over and above his work for me. He is a judge of cattle. So he makes, roughly, one way and another, about four hundred a year."

Marion thought of her own twenty-four, plus her keep. She wondered, simultaneously, why he told her this.

Walter, standing behind her, kept his eyes on the bright tendrils of hair that caressed the white neck.

He put his two hands on her chair back and suddenly Marion heard his quick and heavy breathing.

She moved to stand up, but before she could do so Walter spoke again, in a new voice, arrestingly:

"I make about twice that amount—that is, on the farm. So you know all about me." He paused and in a much lower tone added: "Will you marry me?"

VIII

In her amazement Marion pushed the books violently from her and stood up, turning to Walter as though he had offered her insult. But, for a moment, she said nothing. For one reason, the sight of his face drove all words from her mouth.

He said to her again, drawing back a pace, but with his intent and heated eyes on hers:

"Will you?"

Marion hurried herself and answered, stammering:

"No, no, of course not."

"Why 'of course not'?" demanded Napier. "You're not thinking of that nonsense about my wishing to make Lottie jealous? You were wrong about that. As a matter of fact, I could not have hoped to do it. For Lottie wants you to marry me."

Even in her excitement the words had power to turn Marion's thoughts to Lottie—Lottie, the quite unscrupulous schemer. She said, involuntarily:

"Has she told you so?"

"Both before you came and since," Walter answered, his eyes steady upon her. "She wants that as much as she ever wanted anything. You know that, don't you?"

He did not wait for her answer but, watching her acutely, went on:

"Lottie sometimes fancies she may not live long. In any event, she wants your future secured, and she wants you here. But if she dies she fancies that with you secured to the kiddies as a mother, there'd be a sporting chance that Will wouldn't marry again."

Marion's lips curled. She murmured, scornfully: "Then she doesn't know her husband." On top of that she flushed to find herself talking aloud and, recalling something, told him as she had done once before:

"You don't know Lottie."

"Oh," said Walter, "I'm just repeating what she tells me. Judge for yourself."

And, glancing quickly up at him, Marion saw her sister saying just that, laughing as she drove the dagger into his heart. Again she felt a swift compunction for Walter. But he asked her again:

"Will you?"

So utterly had she lost herself in thoughts of Lottie that she repeated blankly:

"Will I what?"

"Will you marry me?" said Walter again, as baldly. But this time he lost hold of himself a little, and seized her hands.

"I told you no," said Marion, a little resentfully. There had been such an absence of sentiment in the way he made his request that she could but answer it so. She added, challengingly:

"For one reason, you don't want me to."

Instantly she was overwhelmed by the hideousness of her mistake. Napier's hands, holding hers, first leaped and then tightened convulsively. His features worked, his unwavering glance burned.

"I do," he said, hoarsely, "I do."

For more than a moment Marion felt stunned, then hot, then sorry. And as he looked at her, Walter Napier recognized at last that his judgment had been at fault. His estimate of women was, inevitably, the measure of his experience. And such a woman as Marion had not hitherto passed his way. In a few moments he had ceased to hold her hands; his wolfish gaze dropped from her. He turned aside.

"God knows you are right," he said, strangely.

There was a brief, still silence while that in Marion's glance which was compunction and pain and pity deepened. Out of the stress of the moment her eyes filled. For her at that moment Walter was not one man, but many. All men, all women, with their warring inclinations, their thwarted desires, their blind and lonely seeking after many and various gods—happiness, and appetite, and light.

But she knew it was no moment for pity or tarrying. She walked away to the door. With it open in her hand she paused to say, steadily:

"Good-night, Walter."

He had begun to put the ledgers in the safe. But he paused, and with his back toward her, standing suddenly very still, he answered:

"Good-night."

ALDWICH

I

"AND so the town supplies the motif for your life," said Miss Frances, smiling but serious. "Margaret's Mead is just an interlude?"

Marion looked up in quick surprise. "I don't think I have said so, have I?" she said, with the most transparent candour.

Miss Frances's dark eyes smiled more. "Surely not, in so many words," she answered. "Only that is what John has been giving me to see. You have an enthusiasm for business—you will do yourself justice in the town and be rather wasted here." She turned to her nephew lying at ease in a canvas chair. "I'm not misquoting you, am I, John?"

"I don't think you're quoting at all," he answered, amused. "You know," he went on to Marion, "Aunt Frances has fashioned her own little niche for you to fill, and I rather fancy it is quite near Greyladies. So any influence I may have tried to exercise is not approved."

"I should be very glad to have you settled at Margaret's Mead," said Miss Frances, simply. "But that, my dear, is an old woman's selfishness. For you *do* love business, do you not?"

Marion sent a quiet glance to the house of Grey-

ladies and down the smiling lawns sloping to the river. Tea had been laid on a table under the sweeping cedar and a neat maid was now flitting between it and the house clearing away the things. Between the garden and the river path ran a low stone wall, broken by a centre flight of steps against which a boat was moored, and overgrown by a riot of briar roses. A sun dial marked the centre of the lawn; a gravel path ran round it. The garden, like the house, boasted no wealth of colour, but was fringed with graceful trees and low flowering shrubs—its charm faintly austere, to match the gray house with its sunken porch and delicate stone tracery and the cream and yellow roses clambering on its walls. She answered Miss Frances:

"Not in comparison with how I love this."

Her glance sufficiently emphasized "this" and Miss Frances sent a half-questioning, half-triumphant glance to Mr. John. He looked contentedly imperturbable, but his quiet glance reminded Miss Frances of something. She said:

"John would like to hear, and so should I, something about Aldwich if it won't be boring you."

"Aldwich?" repeated Marion, and smiled—a curious, reflective smile. Then she leant forward in her low chair, clasping her hands about her knee, with a sudden hint of eagerness in look and attitude. "Aldwich," she repeated again. "Nothing could be more opposite to . . . to this . . . than my experiences there."

John Preston looked interested. His glance, also,

took quick, comprehensive survey of house and garden. With quickened senses he was conscious of light and shadow, pure straying air, the murmur of the river, the rustle of leaves and song of birds; the sweet odours from the fragrant borders of the kitchen garden beyond the screen of trees. In that moment he seemed to see also the clear greens and browns of the river bottom, the limpid water, the far-stretching countryside; and he saw them as a background to his aunt's slight and dainty dignity and Marion's fresh, sweetly tinted youth. His gaze rested last and long on the girl in her simple frock of blue as she leant forward, suddenly eager, animated, keen to relate.

"We will take 'all this' for granted," he said, in the half-teasing, half-indulgent tone he had always had for Marion. "But I really should like to hear about Aldwich."

"I hope," said Marion, "if it is now incorporated in the South Coast A.B.C., you have known how to reform it. The staff, to start with."

"The men?" asked Miss Frances.

"Oh, no," said Marion. "I was not thinking of the bakehouse. I was concerned with indoors. There was the manageress. She was engaged to a deep-sea diver."

Her audience looked slightly bewildered, as perhaps Marion whimsically intended. She explained.

"He earned rather a lot of money, and in the ordinary course of things he sent the bulk of it to his fiancée to bank for him. At such times Miss Dee

was quite a good chief to work under—at others, not."

"Why not?" asked John Preston, briefly.

"Oh, they were rather elemental," said Marion, casually, "the Aldwich set. If the money didn't come, Miss Dee knew the diver was drinking, which upset her. So she used to sit on the stairs and weep and refuse to eat and take stimulants instead. That made it necessary for the one servant to spend most of her time looking after her."

Miss Frances looked horrified, but Marion went on:

"So on those days even the shop was not always swept. And the bakehouse made out its own order list—generally of things we didn't want. Most of the house never was swept, ordinarily . . . . there was a good deal of washing up."

John Preston asked: "What about the district secretary?"

"Oh, he came twice a week. There was always a surface tidying up before he came. And he never criticised Miss Dee much. The Aldwich branch paid."

"Then the manageress was really a capable woman," hazarded Miss Frances.

Marion said briefly: "Aldwich has a large floating population and the A.B.C. happens to be the confectioners nearest the sea. There's no serious competition. Run on Southbay lines, the turnover could be multiplied by twelve."

Mr. John objected: "Southbay ran no tea rooms, no restaurant."

Marion answered quickly: "I used the wrong word. I meant Southbay principles. At Aldwich we had comparatively no regular customers. People came once. When I left they were still serving from chequer cake that was in cut when I went there."

Miss Frances interposed, astonished: "How long?"

Marion replied, "Seven weeks," and added: "Their cakes never got stale."

"Too sweeping," commented Mr. John, laughing gently. He stared, arrested, when Marion answered, primly:

"Literally true." She added, after a pause, "Aldwich did not suit me. I have not even the makings of a really good liar."

Mr. John threw his cigarette away. He said, rising:

"You know, of course, that we have acquired that business?"

"Yes, I know," said Marion. "Has Mrs. George been down there?"

"I don't think so."

"It would be a good plan," Marion suggested, "if she went to Aldwich—not for a day—but say for a week, and dropped in to the A.B.C. once or twice a day."

"Isn't that rather like spying?" suggested Miss Frances. She felt vaguely disquieted, degraded even, by the sordidness of the tale elicited. Both she and her nephew were astounded, none the less, when Marion's face suddenly flamed.

"It is not spying, dear Miss Frances," she said, with a sudden white heat of emphasis, "to expose crime. The Aldwich A.B.C. is a crime—a sordid, dishonest, uncleanly, health-corrupting crime. A business conducted without a single endeavour to give honest value for money received; without a single thought for the health and welfare of its staff. Our hours of work were from eight to eight, and if we wanted clean bedrooms we must clean them before or after those hours—I finished mine once a week somewhere about midnight. Unfortunately I couldn't wash bed-linen in that time! I worked by artificial light all day in a room where daylight never penetrated!"

Mr. John remarked, experimentally: "You were not obliged to stay there."

Marion smiled. "But I can imagine circumstances when I should have been. Supposing I had similar luck once or twice . . . you must stay somewhere, for the sake of a reference."

"When you said just now," he criticised again, "that the turnover could be multiplied by twelve, I assume you were not confusing turnover with profit?"

"Hardly," said Marion. Her lips took a slightly ironical curve. "We may assume I recognize the distinction. But hazarding a guess I should say it would be fair to suppose that the multiplication of turnover by twelve would multiply profits by six—even on an honest administration."

"It is at any rate arguable," said Mr. John, quietly. His eyes travelled observantly to his

aunt's face—to the delicate flush on her clear cheek and the look of trouble in her dark eyes. He remarked to the look:

"This is an age when girls have to work for their living."

Marion caught him up quickly.

"There has never been an age when the majority of women hadn't. Only it used to be done in their own homes. My grandmother baked and brewed, wove her own cloth and made her own soap and starch and candles, besides mere butter and jams and cheese. Needless to say she needed hired help or the help of all her daughters. Modern industry has changed all that. Women must follow their work whither it goeth."

She ended on a smile, but it left her eyes quickly. She turned to Miss Frances to say:

"Are you thinking that no one can get servants?"

Even Miss Frances looked confused. She winced as she said, sadly: "My dear, I am very ignorant and very old-fashioned."

Impossible for Marion not to feel rebuked, for all her high purpose and singleness of aim, as youth often is rebuked by the very defencelessness of age. She took in hers one of the thin, frail hands that lay passive but nervous in Miss Frances's lap and said, humbly:

"I did not say that quite as I meant it. Only . . . only don't you agree that it is just the most stinging indictment of service that girls will prefer to it even the conditions I have described?"

Miss Frances answered, gently: "Partly. But also, my dear, I shall wait to see all men willing to be hewers of wood before I expect all women to desire to be drawers of water."

The low white gate swung open, and Dorothea came up the path.

II

The entrance of Dorothea, clad in white and swinging a tennis racket, created a diversion. First Marion had to be greeted on this her first call at Greyladies, and Dorothea did so prettily, as she did most things, kissing Marion affectionately and pausing by her chair with a guileless flow of chatter. She was an arrestingly pretty child, tall and big for her age, with a mass of dark curly hair, a pretty smooth curve of cheek, and charming liquid gray eyes. Those eyes seemed all wistful innocence and appeal; astonishing then, that they should be allied to a sensual curve of lip and wide, flat nostril. Marion always had a difficulty in reconciling Dorothea's eyes and nose; a difficulty Dorothea's father did not share. There had been burnt into him by harsh experience the whole meaning of those melting, appealing eyes that most people apprized so differently.

Marion could not understand Mr. Preston's attitude to his daughter. He was fond of her, and proud in a sense of her beauty. But he seemed for ever putting a curb or restraint on his fondness, turning from it with austerity and impatience. Yet it was obvious that Dorothea was well enough

pleased with what caresses she got from her father, never doubting her power to please and charm him and taking his fondness for granted. This trait he seemed to detest in her as a sort of unwarranted vanity, and then, remembering his fatherhood, chid himself for his folly. Dorothea bore no faintest resemblance to him, but was wholly and solely her mother's.

She chattered to them now of tennis, and of who played, and of what she had eaten for tea—a prettily confessed gourmande. She asked nicely after Marion's sister and whether she might come to see her or could take out Bobbie and Clare. All refreshingly simple and sweet-natured. Then she went off and forgot all about them, except to wonder with quite intent interest whether Marion would marry that brusque, red-faced Mr. Napier.

For Marion she made the most appealing picture of unaffected girlish innocence and beauty. She envied her as she lingered, with happy, confident familiarity, at her father's side—so daintily attired, so healthy, fortunate, and care-free. After all, what had women like Miss Frances and the Dorothea of a near future to do with the problems that seemed so pressingly and peculiarly her own? And how mean and ugly those problems seemed against this gracious, easy, confident freedom of the happy well-to-do. How much harder it seemed to say at Greyladies what Marion was wont to say to herself passionately, often, that people who added nothing to the sum of the world's wealth had no right to a share in it. But did Miss Frances add nothing?

Marion knew that she did. Would Dorothea add nothing? The chances were that she would richly do her part as wife and mother. Then where must she look for idle, fruitless, useless lives? Marion believed whole-heartedly that such lives there were, nor was she wrong. But already, side by side with her insistent demand that in a world where man lives by the sweat of his brow every soul should do its share of earning, there was growing in her mind a perception of the ever-widening and diverse ways in which the earning could be done.

Miss Frances was the first to hark back to the point at which Dorothea had interrupted them. She asked, with a rather pathetic, hopeful eagerness:

"There were compensating factors, I suppose, even at Aldwich?"

Marion would have loved to be able to set her mind at rest. But she could not. She said, smiling:

"I don't think of any. You mustn't think me guilty of coming to a sweeping conclusion on the few points I named. They were only thrown out as suggesting the general trend of things. It would be rather a pity to do more."

Because Miss Frances looked perplexed she supplied the reason.

"It would be a rather dreary catalogue of sordid details of bad management. And it would put out the sunlight for you and Mr. Preston." She looked up at the latter to say, further: "For I'm assuming Aldwich will be looked into."

"You mean that you think you've said enough to secure that," Mr. Preston replied to the look. "And if you haven't?"

"Would you like me to say more?" asked Marion.

He looked at her intently, half annoyed and half amused. The fact was that he had felt rather satisfied with Aldwich. But as she met the look Marion's became relieved under it. She said to Miss Frances:

"You know the Prestons have a tender business conscience!"

III

After Marion had gone home Miss Frances tried to sort out her rather tangled impressions of her favourite. First she looked with wistful perplexity for the "little Mary" of her dreams; the quaintly voluble, lovable child who had mingled her vivacious moods with long spells of silent and serious dreaming, and at her most joyous was never noisy or boisterous—her intense vitality of the spirit, a brightly glancing flame.

Miss Frances, a dreamer herself, had destined her Mary for poet or artist—was not her father such? Would not she follow in his steps, with a firmer and more consistent tread, less of caprice and more of purpose? But this girl! Immersed in all the petty commercial life of her day! Where was the Mary of her dreams?

Gradually, as Miss Frances sat in the twilight—a frail and slight but none-the-less dignified figure with dark eyes darker for the delicacy of her skin

and the whiteness of her hair—the little Mary of her cherished memories was re-born to her. Nothing had Marion lacked of Miss Frances's desire in grace of form and fairness of face, and gradually that sweet outer husk of her became informed with the very spirit and fervour for which she had seemed to look in vain. Miss Frances stirred restlessly in her chair as though with pleased excitement, her thin hands folding and unfolding nervously in her lap. When her nephew came in from the garden to find her sitting in the gathering dark he was startled by the ringing pleasure of the voice in which she said to him:

"John, you are quite wrong. She is still exactly my little Mary."

It was too dark for her short-sighted eyes to see how suddenly and arrestedly still the man became. She knew he paused for a natural breathing-space before he said, evenly:

"Am I so wrong? I always assured you she was that very same child."

"In a way that made me doubt it," cried his aunt, on a note of triumphant disdain. "She isn't a scrap your shrewd business woman. She's just a visionary—a dreamer, with perfectly unpractical and other-worldly ideas of what appertains to business. She's only interested in details because through them she sees the whole."

"Go on," said John. His voice sounded as though he might be tolerantly amused, or merely collecting material for debate. He hated twilight, but he did not ring for lights.

"If," continued Miss Frances, with dainty derision, "you succeeded in your pet scheme of weighting her with the responsibilities of a business —especially a limited company concern, as she describes it—she would break down under the stress of it. The drudgery would bore her and conflicting principles would impose an everlasting strain. Far better for her to be at Margaret's Mead."

"While her sister lives," said John Preston, on a curious note. "And afterward?"

"Afterward?" echoed Miss Frances, rather blankly. "Well, I imagine she will be needed more, afterward."

"I see," said her nephew, "until she marries, or until the brother-in-law marries again. If the brother-in-law marries she'd have to resume business, I suppose, and resume it at a disadvantage. Or are we to take it for granted she will marry, to avert that disaster?"

"How very far-sighted, John!" said Miss Frances, but in a rather troubled voice. "I must say one thing concerns me a great deal. I never could like those Napiers, and they have it in the kitchen——"

Her voice trailed off. She rose from her chair.

"My dear boy," she said, "I forgot you hated the gloaming!"

"Never mind," answered her nephew, absently. "What were you saying was the talk in the kitchen?"

"If I was saying anything," said Miss Frances, "it was hopelessly indiscreet. However, you know

what servants are! They have it that Mrs. Napier is bent on making a match for Marion with Walter."

"Walter Napier!" said John Preston, with quite loud incredulity. "That hog!"

"No, dear," said Miss Frances, with rather malicious serenity. "He's a Socialist. So, I believe, are you. And so, certainly, is Marion."

IV

Lottie was awake, wide-eyed and greedy for news, when Marion reached home from Greyladies. She took up her supper—a tray dainty with spotless napery and silver—prepared to satisfy as well as she could the eager interest given such inadequate voice by Lottie's low, tired tones.

The day had been calm and fair and all the beauty of hill and meadow and copse, of wide expanse and murmuring stream was present to Marion as she moved about her sister's room: a fair and airy prison, but still a prison, and appealing to Marion as such in a wave of compassion and pity as she came in from the sweet and gracious open air.

"Tell me," Lottie had uttered, briefly and simply, as Marion made the preparations necessary to spare her any, even the least, exertion. The embroidered sleeves of her night dress slipped back from her painfully wasted arms; she lifted her fingers with a gesture and Marion recovered the wedding ring and keeper that slipped from them and rolled to the floor.

"Don't give them back to me," Lottie said. "Put them away. They're so heavy. I'm tired

of slipping them into place. There has been nothing else to do but just that since you've been away. Now tell me—anything that is not sickness or Margaret's Mead."

It was fortunate that Marion was still under the stimulus of the desire to relate. She told Lottie, with contagious interest, all that she wanted to know.

"One notices in detail now all the things that one missed as a child," she said, "or, rather, took in as an inevitable whole. When we are little we seem to think things come about of their own accord—just happen to be. I know I never thought of comparing Greyladies with Margaret's Mead."

"They're not a bit alike," said Lottie, restlessly. "You can't compare them." She added, jealously: "Which do you prefer, Marion?"

"Margaret's Mead," said Marion, gladly because wholeheartedly. "At Greyladies I miss the warmth and glow of colour. I love our grass paths and herbaceous borders. But Greyladies has its own distinct charm . . . the inside matches the outside—square rooms, lofty and cool and plain. Do you remember how the big drawing room goes up through two stories?"

"I suppose it does," said Lottie, reminiscently, "but I don't remember it very clearly. I never went there much. Is it pretty?"

"Very. Miss Frances has it done up in white and lilac and green. Panelled walls painted white, hung with water colours. The tall windows curtained in mauve silk and white muslin. The vases and even the fireplace tiles mauve and white, the

furniture white and gold with chintz covers—lilac and green leaves on a white ground."

Lottie said, rather resentfully: "She can afford to squander money. Fancy being able to refurnish a room to match its decoration!"

Marion opened her mouth to reply but closed it without speaking. It would not do to disagree with Lottie, even over a trifle. Instead she asked:

"Has Miss Wilson plenty?"

"Of money?" said Lottie. "She's reputed to have. But she was the middle girl of seven and they all had to have marriage portions, so I don't see that she could have much. Her father was never wealthy, I'm told, but an uncle left her some. But they're 'gentry', you know, the Wilsons; round here people never let you forget that. So you'll raise us tremendously, Marion, by visiting at Greyladies!"

Marion laughed, she could not help it, at the sarcastic inflections of Lottie's voice.

"How funny!" she said. "And what a thorn in the flesh old Mr. Preston must have been, with his bakeries! He's rather a delicious old man though, Lottie."

"Ah," said Lottie. "What's the girl like, Marion? Dorothea?"

Marion told her, quite enthusiastically, unaware that Lottie scanned her face. She told her of Dorothea's enquiries, and closed with:

"When you're better, Lottie, may I ask them here to tea?"

"Miss Frances and Dorothea?" said Lottie, languidly. "I thought Miss Frances didn't go out."

"Nor does she," said Marion. "I meant Dorothea and her father."

"Ask them now," said Lottie. "Then Will and Walter can have their tea upstairs with me. That's what you meant me to say, isn't it?"

Marion's cheek flushed hotly and her hands shook, but she knew she must be impenetrable to Lottie's thrusts. After a minute or two she answered, quite evenly:

"Mr. Preston is going to London for a day or two. I quite hope you will be downstairs by the time he comes back."

Lottie said nothing and Marion, a little heartsick, turned away. Why was Lottie's nature so perversely, suspiciously jealous and cruel? In the next moment she heard a stifled sob—there was Lottie, shaken by an instant paroxysm of penitence and remorse.

Marion said, fondling and soothing her: "Don't; oh, don't! There's no need. I know you through and through; just how much you mean."

It was true in the main, though superficially as generous as false. But she felt, hopelessly, how foredoomed to failure was any attempt to keep Lottie calm. And wondered again, passionately, how Lottie could so love and at the same time belittle her men.

V

Within five and twenty minutes Lottie had forgotten her tears and Marion had led the talk, by way of Greyladies, away from controversial topics

and was telling her of Aldwich. Aldwich was fresh in her mind to-day, not at all because of Miss Frances's request, but because one incident, she scarcely knew how, persisted in linking itself to the episode with Walter of the night before.

Marion puzzled over the reason, for she argued that the two were wide as the poles apart. Yet here they were, persistently linked together by memory as though they helped to make a whole. Lottie elicited the story with her casual, teasing:

"And what about the men, Mary? Aren't there ever any men?"

"There was a man at Aldwich," said Marion, clasping her hands round her knee with a rather perverse look. "I didn't like him, Lottie; and it isn't a pretty story. But you can have it, if you like."

"Well, what about it?" said Lottie. Marion's tone intrigued her. She told herself, however, that she knew Marion's style of man and could make a good guess at the story. But for all that there was a hint of apprehension in her teasing smile. She hated the very thought of any unpleasant or evil thing touching Marion. This half-jealous apprehension made her say again, rather sharply: "What about it?"

"You know Aldwich, don't you," said Marion, leisurely and conversationally; "the long parade where the sea breaks in flying scuds when the tide is in and which overlooks about a mile of sullen, rock-studded sands when it is out. We were walking on the sands one Sunday afternoon——"

"Who's 'we'?" Lottie stopped her to ask.

"I and the servant. You see, common as she certainly was, she was less so than the other assistant and the waitress; and as the manageress made a confidential friend of her there were no barriers up. But I called her Emily and she called me 'Miss' and I thought we shared friendship and respect between us until she proved spy, tell-tale, and liar. But she was a pretty girl. One owed her some gratitude for that."

"You might," said literal Lottie, "but I shouldn't."

"Well, anyway," continued Marion, "there we were, on a hot sunny afternoon in May. There were funny little twirls in the wet sand and I was much concerned to find out what caused them; I had never seen such at Southbay. I was poking at them with my sunshade and speculating aloud to Emily, and a man kindly volunteered the information."

"Did you know he was near?" said Lottie.

Marion replied: "I suppose so. There was nobody else within a hundred yards and I'm not blind."

"Did you mean him to answer," Lottie persisted.

"Did I?" said Marion. "I don't know. I hadn't spoken to a soul outside the A.B.C. in the three weeks I'd been there, and of those inside, the maid-of-all-work, such as I've described her, was the most companionable. The being near us looked like a gentleman—he raised his hat courteously and half apologized for overhearing when he spoke to us. It was rather funny. I was im-

mediately tongue-tied and in another minute I heard Emily primly remarking that Aldwich was noted for its prawns."

Lottie stared. "What?" she said, blankly.

"Well, it was, you know. And as a conversational effort for Emily I thought it not bad. But the stranger lingered, and as things seemed halting I felt bound to help them along. He had rather charming manners and the three of us strolled along the sands together, talking, for about a mile."

"What was he like? What was his name?" asked Lottie, eagerly. She had lost sight of her solicitude for Marion in pursuit of the tale.

"Tall, with a slight stoop. Wore eye-glasses. Dressed quietly, not without distinction. Plain features, weedy moustache, well read, well travelled, and staying at Baydon, at Baroness Trant's."

"Did he tell you so?" asked Lottie, suspiciously.

"I forget whether he did or not," Marion answered, laconically, "but I know he was. I remember he passed the shop with the Baroness the following morning. On the occasions he met me afterward—you see it had to be after eight—he usually wore a light coat over evening clothes."

"Marion," said Lottie, wisely, "that fact alone marked it out for a folly. You weren't wearing evening dress."

"I know," said Marion. "I meant it for a folly. And it was. I told you it wasn't a pretty story. I did dislike him, too. I've hated men who wear glasses ever since."

"What happened then?" said Lottie, irritably and uneasily.

"Nothing important. He used to tell me how he loved the Baydon end of the parade, where the fields run down to the sea. As a matter of fact, I had told him I loved it first. And then I used to think I would shun that end, and then I didn't see why I should. And Emily used to say: 'Do let us go for a walk.' And always she had an errand near Baydon. And of course we met him. And of course Emily went off, on her errand."

"Who told her she wasn't wanted?" asked Lottie.

"Her senses, I suppose," said Marion, casually. "I certainly didn't. As a matter of fact, I used to be in a perfect panic when she left me—it was so perfectly odious, all of it."

"What was?" said Lottie.

"Oh, I don't know. The whole thing. The assumption left that he wanted my society or I wanted his—which I certainly and passionately didn't. And the false position and the wrongness of it—all for nothing at all!"

"What did you do it for, then?" said Lottie, practically.

"As though you don't know! It was just the excitement of it—the very wrongness and awryness —a sort of element of mischief and daring and risk. Just to give people the chance to talk—which they did—and laugh at their wrong constructions. And to go on not knowing what on earth might happen next!"

Lottie said: "I thought you were so sensible. I

love a bit of fun—always did—but I never would have dreamed of doing a mad, insane thing like that."

"If it hadn't been extreme I shouldn't have wanted to do it," answered Marion. She murmured, under her breath, what she dared not say to Lottie: "I couldn't have got excitement out of flirting with the baker!"

Lottie waxed warm to her theme.

"Of course people said things. It was just making yourself a mark for scandal. And he couldn't have been a nice man——"

"He wasn't," interposed Marion. "I think I've said so more than once."

"As for being a gentleman——" went on Lottie.

"There are so many definitions of a gentleman," reminded Marion, sweetly. "I only said he looked like one."

Lottie gave it up. "Well, how did it end?" she said. "You deserved to be well punished for your folly."

"I was," her sister answered. "Thoroughly! When you are by the sea, do you know when the tide comes in and goes out?"

"Yes—no," said Lottie. "I might. Why?"

"Because I didn't," said Marion. "It never occurred to me to reckon from one day to another. And so we were caught by the tide, where the wall of Baydon park sweeps up from the sands, and all but cut off, after nine o'clock on a June night."

"Where were you?" asked Lottie. Her voice sounded tense.

Marion remembered Lottie suddenly. She said, hastily: "It was nothing. You're not upset, are you, Lottie? We just jumped the breakwaters."

"But how silly," breathed her sister. "Marion——"

"Oh," said Marion, "there's no need to say 'don't do it again.' Be sure I never shall. And really, it was almost a joke. You see I didn't notice the tide coming in a bit, because he had chosen that spot to sit and talk where the wall curls back, and the sea seemed quite a long way off. Only suddenly I didn't like him—he mauled my hand, and you know I can't bear people to touch me! So I jumped up and said I knew it was late, though I had little idea how late it was; nothing would induce me to linger a minute. Then when we got to the curve of the wall and had to go down the sands to round it, of course the tide was in—we jumped the breakwater in nearly two feet of water. I was furiously angry at first . . . and then it was rather fun!"

"Fun!" echoed Lottie.

"He got so wet, and he had to be so apologetic. He wasn't strong, really, and I think he was afraid of the wetting. We had to jump quite a lot of breakwaters—he tripped over one. And every moment I got more amused—reaction, I suppose—I really had been very frightened."

"He knew, of course, that the tide was in," ventured Lottie. She hardly knew the Marion of this adventure.

"I assumed, of course, that he didn't," Marion

answered. "But he spent nearly all day every day lounging on the front. In the end I felt rather sorry for him."

Lottie gave an astonished "Why?" She was still seeing her sister trapped with this stranger by the encroaching sea, an unscaleable wall at her back, through long hours of the summer night.

"He was deluded rather, don't you think?" said Marion. "He'd wasted quite a lot of time on me. But I suppose he enjoyed it—as a pursuit, if as nothing more. We had some rather good talks, too," she added, regretfully. "He'd read a lot of books."

"Did you dislike him, Mary, all the time?"

"Utterly," said Marion. "So utterly that when we said good-bye that night I even let him kiss me—all over my face. I thought perhaps I owed him as much as that. He seemed to me then a sort of monster. And it was odd to think of him kissing that mask of me, while I watched him, curious about it, a mile or two off."

VI

There was hardly need of Lottie's "Did you meet him again after that?" and Marion's decisive "Never," to finish the story. It left Lottie, on the whole, curiously stimulated and relieved. At least half of her impatience over Marion's freedom from love affairs had sprung, though she did not know it, from an elder-sisterly solicitude as to how she would comport herself among those shoals. Lottie believed, and rightly, that Marion's persistent

idealization, creating for her as it did men shorn of all human weakness, rendered her peculiarly liable to shipwreck. For this reason, above all others, she had despised her faith as crude blindness, and hated while she despised it. Now she was utterly relieved.

Nothing could be safer, she thought, than the detachment of Marion's attitude to fully recognized facts—that quite interested but faintly ironic detachment which the manner, even more than the matter, of her story gave to her sister.

It was inevitable that Lottie should fail to see the matter whole, and, failing, interpret it wrongly. Marion's world was still divided into the sheep and goats, as was betrayed by her very handling of the Aldwich episode. It is probable that its fabric might have been shattered by Walter Napier the night before if she had not been so occupied with other matters—Lottie's illness; John Preston's visit. For more than a minute revelation had hovered; she had had for Walter insight and pity. But she did not like him; he was distasteful to her. And she had dismissed the subject, only pausing upon it afterward because it linked itself—as she thought oddly, inscrutably—with the incident at Aldwich.

It was impossible—it always is impossible—that a girl of Marion's intelligence should grow up ignorant of life. Lottie had known that, and Marion's ideal men had irritated her the more. But Lottie was not a sensitive dreamer as Marion was, and she also forgot that what knowledge girls

get is tainted at its source. The newspaper, the immodest jest or rhyme, the unbalanced sex novel, youth's ignorant guess and curious whisper—such, at the best, is the fount from which it springs.

A subject never named by loving or reverent lips; on which no warning note is sounded by those whose counsel is constant on others. Is it not one that even to touch is to be defiled? Is it not one that can present no temptation except to the utterly depraved? Were it otherwise, would not those so constant guides and counsellors give counsel here?

So, by a quite simple process of reasoning, delicate-minded youth disregards its own quite palpable experiences, and divides its world into the sheep and the goats. The sheep know not temptation; the goats, being tempted, are depraved. If the poor classifier is miserably conscious of temptation, of warring instincts and impulses making temptation inevitable, that, alas! increases by one the number of the goats! But the sheep—woolly, white, untempted—are none the less a fact. Perhaps one believes in and admires them the more fervently for being one's self so definitely—but, it is hoped, unrecognizedly—among the goats.

Last Days

I

If Lottie was relieved, though groundlessly, of her apprehensions in regard to Marion, seeing her no more as a vain seeker after romantic platonic love, suffering disillusion and heartbreak while the real things of life passed her by, it is certain that she found no grounds for becoming optimistic over the chances of her marrying Walter.

Marion had expressed herself unwaveringly about her Aldwich admirer. First and last, she had no liking for him, nor had an inevitable approbation of his good taste recommended him. Lottie foresaw that it might not be enough for Walter unmistakably to admire and desire her; even though it was in addition to his offer of a long-loved and much-desired home. And Lottie naturally doubted Walter's power wholeheartedly to admire and desire Marion—while she beheld Marion standing aloof, still nicely discriminating in her loves and hates and cold-bloodedly impervious to men's desires.

Even as she lay, in the days that remained to her, intensely thinking and utterly interested in the things her thoughts followed, events downstairs were arranging and re-arranging themselves in patterns she knew nothing of.

Already, for Marion, Walter's offer had recoloured life at Margaret's Mead. It was no longer a brief refuge from the things in business that were ugly and repelled her; no longer a halting at her childhood's home, familiarly dear; no longer the fulfilment of a known duty. But instead it was a long dallying with a bait to tempt her, a lure to deceive her, a fair seeming whose substance had flown.

"Will you marry me?" "No, of course not." In the quiet night—wakeful nights of frequent attendance upon Lottie—those phrases would repeat themselves in Marion's ear; and linked to the first came fleeting pictures of Margaret's Mead at early morn, at sunny moon, at pensive eve. She stepped about in sunshine, busy between house and garden, with happy straying thoughts born of the simple, homely things her eyes rested on. Or it was afternoon, and rain fell, and sweet fragrances stole in from field and garden through the open windows. Or evening with its leisure and the homestead, warm and mellow and lovely against dreaming tree and evening sky, greeting restfully homeward steps and the declining day, promising shelter and refreshment and repose.

No sordid pictures blemished Marion's memories of Margaret's Mead; life staged itself there in ideal settings. And yet how quick and sharp quite other pictures followed the denying sentence: "No, of course not."

Walter, stimulating, jeering, aggressive; Walter, summarizing what he owned and offering it;

Walter, daring to foresee himself as part of her component whole—"the human unit" she had heard him call it! Here she tried violently to turn the current of her thoughts with a rapid, "No, no! Don't think about it," but images of Walter were obtrusive. Walter, desiring with his eyes and thickened voice every part of her that mattered nothing—her resemblances to Lottie, her mere fleshly covering and outer presentment of tints and curves—"all that is not me," thought Marion, "and within and without which I exist unknown of him." Walter, reluctantly recognizing that unknown Ego of hers, and thereupon setting himself deliberately the task of wooing it—unloved and undesired as it was—for what went with it. Walter, uncouth and capable; Walter, over-sexed and cynical; Walter, aggressively boasting the things he wished least to be.

"I could never marry him," Marion told herself, busily dressing a salad she could not trust to Kate. "And now it is linked with him I hate the thought of Margaret's Mead."

Walter came in from the courtyard and, observing her task, silently set his gun down, washed his hands at the trough, and swiftly and adroitly sliced a cucumber for her. As he did so he told her what he had shot, and where, and asked if she and Lottie had watched the sunset. Marion felt, as she had done often before, the man's intense physical magnetism assail her, defying her to be too sure of her power of denial.

She answered him, thanking him smilingly for his

help, and putting forth all her power of self-control to keep her voice casual and her eyes calm. His very presence created in her a panic of disturbance and insurrection which she prayed his watching eyes might not see.

"I shall ask Clark if he can recommend a trained nurse to-morrow," he remarked, presently. "Were the kiddies in bed when you got home?" Marion had been with Walter to Minterne, shopping.

"Yes," she replied, startled. She was considering his first announcement. "Why?"

"I told Phyllis not to worry you if they were," said Walter, calmly. "I think Clare is sickening for measles."

Marion's heart sank. She said, unbelievingly:

"What makes you think so? She was well enough when I left this morning."

"I do think so," said Walter, "and I don't think I'm wrong. Go and have a look at her. I've told Phyllis what to do until the doctor sees her. I've had Bobbie's cot put in my room."

"I can take Bobbie," said Marion, hastily, and stopped. She was sleeping in the dressing room that opened out of Lottie's to be at hand in the night. So she added, quickly:

"Will can take him. Why should you?"

"Will's room is next to Lottie's," Walter reminded her. "There'd be too much noise in the early morning. I'll look after Bobbie. But we must get a nurse for Lottie to set you free after to-night."

Marion asked, anxiously: "Will not a nurse worry Lottie? Did you see Doctor Clark to-day?"

"I did. Lottie's too sensible to worry over a kid having measles and the fact will sufficiently account for the need of a nurse. So, personally, I think it's rather lucky. Clark agreed with me to-day that *you* must not continue to nurse her."

Marion flushed angrily. "It is what I came here for," she said, hastily.

"Is it?" said Walter, calmly. "Take it from me that I never agreed to that proposition, once Lottie required close attention. There are seeds one does *not* plant in suitable soil. You were and are very necessary to Lottie; agreed. But sisters with joint hereditary tendencies shouldn't nurse one another." He added, grimly: "Don't persist in mixing me up with Will."

Marion ran upstairs to look at Clare and interrogate Phyllis. It seemed to her that Walter followed, diagnosing and dominating, by her side. His unfailing rightness about things oppressed her. Of course it would prove to be measles—the shepherd's children had it—and the nurse would come and cares and responsibilities multiply. How did Walter know anything about measles?

Walter made no mystery of that but directed her with a gesture, when she asked him, to the source of his information on the bookshelf. He gave her the page number, and when she had found it came behind her and ran his large finger along the symptoms and treatment. His sleeve brushed her

shoulder. Marion pushed her chair back, saying, impatiently:

"Where's Will? Supper is ready."

Walter looked up and out.

"Coming," he said, "with Mr. Preston, apparently."

II

The two men were, indeed, coming across the paddock, and Marion had just time to make sure of the fact before Kate, entering with the lamp, pulled down the blinds. She said to her, hastily:

"Take the lamp into the oak room, Kate," whereupon Walter's look asked her, sneering, why she should think Preston was coming in.

But he was, and, as Marion had anticipated, Will took him through courtyard and kitchen straight to the one lighted room, she reflecting, rightly, that but for her foresight it would have been to the one where the table was laid for supper. As it was she wondered, annoyed, why it should be through courtyard and kitchen and why—glimpsing them as they passed into the oak room—Will kept his hat on.

Walter had not failed to notice also the offending hat, and as he followed her to the kitchen his keen glance gathered malice. Undoubtedly he had his pleasure in seeing Marion's sense of fitness outraged. Unfailingly his glance said to her: "True, he's my brother. He's also the man your sister has chosen. After all, one can't *choose* one's brother!"

Marion said, shortly: "I wonder what he wants."

"Preston, do you mean?" said Walter. "I can tell you what he's supposed to want. The fishing."

Marion stifled her reply; but if she expected silence to provoke information from Walter she was disappointed. He watched quite equably Kate's preparation of a lamp for the dining room and heard Marion exhorting her to prepare them in the daylight and not to leave them until just when they were wanted. Will came out of the oak room, obviously looking for them.

"Have you made up your mind about the rent?" he asked his brother.

Walter looked at Marion curiously. She was unfeignedly indifferent. He asked, deliberately:

"Is that what he's come for? I thought I was to let him know."

"Oh, yes," said Will. "But we got talking." He followed his brother's glance to Marion and strove to banter. "He really came to bring a book to Marion."

Marion looked up at him. His full, sallow face was lined with preoccupation and fear for Lottie so that he could not taste the flavour of his own teasing jest. She realized that he had welcomed Mr. Preston's society because it would please Lottie. She moved to him with sympathetic compunction.

"Lottie wants you," she said. She removed the offending hat. "Walter can see Mr. Preston. Don't wear your hat upstairs; Lottie won't like it."

As he followed her implied instructions numbly and to the letter she murmured, sympathetically, "Poor old Will!"

Walter followed her ruling, too, perforce, his eyes red and angry and bitterness at his heart. He recognized the skilfulness of her retaliation—the thrust at his wound with weapons that were Lottie's.

But he left Marion sad as well as triumphant. It was no pleasure to her that Walter could be stabbed through Will's right to Lottie. She was tired of watching the two men suffer, and of realizing that of the two Walter suffered more. She thought his passion for her sister merely hopelessly wrong, and was helplessly angered that his suffering should seem to lend it dignity and sanction. As for the attempt at a jest about Mr. Preston—it was merely inevitable to their type of mind.

When Kate's entrance disturbed her musing, Marion moved from the window whence she looked into the deepening twilight and recalled Will's mention of a book.

She sauntered after Walter into the oak room.

III

John Preston was conscious that Napier's eyes watched him, lynx like, as he shook hands with Marion, and he jumped to the conclusion that the kitchen talk was well founded. Reluctantly but fair-mindedly he had revised his opinion of Walter. He did not like him but he ceased to hold him in contempt.

"Your brother-in-law told me this was the best time to find Mr. Napier in," he said to Marion, "so as I was coming I brought this book along. I

was on my way to give it to Warner to bring out in the morning."

Marion stole a glance at Walter as she gave her thanks for the book. And Mr. Preston added:

"Only I notice you have here an excellent edition of Montaigne."

Marion followed his glance to the low bookshelves. She answered, quickly:

"A quite useless one in this house. You will find Ibsen and Goethe, too. But they are all in the original."

Walter drew a book out with his clumsy fingers and threw it open on the table. Apparently the small business transaction was concluded. His eye showed pride in the fine letterpress as John Preston took up the book with an exclamation, but his lip was curled in a sneer.

"Hardly useless," he answered Marion, and turned on his heel. He added explanatorily from the door: "The books are mine. I never read translations. Good-night, Mr. Preston."

John Preston put the book gently down. He took a long, quiet look at Marion. He remarked, reflectively:

"So that is Walter Napier!"

Marion looked up. She had been obviously and intensely surprised by Walter's remark and looked up out of her bewilderment. She said, simply:

"Had you not met him before?"

"I had never spoken to him," said Mr. Preston. He was keenly aware of the new note that discussion of her people must give to their intimacy.

"I have heard . . . a good deal of him. He ought to be interesting."

Marion said, "Why?" She could hardly have said more plainly that she found him repulsive. John Preston gave a pitying thought to the man who in this solitude took pains to read the literature of three nations in the original. Nevertheless——

"You should ask Aunt Frances to tell you about him," he answered her, lightly, but there was a hint of amused retrospection in his voice. Obviously he was not displeased with what Marion must hear. Then he noticed that she looked both tired and sad. He asked, hastily:

"How is your sister?"

Marion's reply was sufficiently expressive in its sadness. "She suffers a great deal," she answered him. "And that's not all. Walter thinks little Clare has measles." She looked worried. "I don't know whether you ought to be here. I am thinking of Dorothea."

In his concern he missed the last part of her sentence. He said, anxiously:

"I don't know much about illness, but surely you mustn't nurse both patients?"

Marion said, frankly, "I don't know, either. But Walter has made up his mind I am to give up nursing Lottie."

Preston uttered, surprised: "Walter! What does your sister's husband say?"

Marion shook her head. "I don't know and it doesn't matter," she replied. "You see Will doesn't count. I want to continue to nurse Lottie.

Walter has decided that in any event I must not."

"I am sure he is right," said John Preston, but very kindly. He had said no word of farewell though he moved to go and Marion followed him to the porch mechanically. She said there:

"You will explain to Miss Frances why I do not come."

"Will you not come?" he answered, protesting. "You must have some change, some relief. Aunt will drive over and fetch you."

"There's Dorothea," began Marion. Oddly but instinctively she clung to the atmosphere of friendliness he brought with him and wished him to linger. She knew, without analyzing her knowledge, that to him and in a lesser degree to Miss Frances her welfare was of quite real importance.

"Dorothea?" He seemed checked. He had entirely lost sight of the measles. They stood together in the warm dark. Marion reminded him.

He said, dismissing the matter: "Dorothea's not a child. She's had them. But we must see what can be done." To that he added abruptly: "But you are happy here?"

"Happy?" Out of some confusion of thought Marion considered that she probably was happy at that moment. "I suppose I am," she said, doubtfully, "in patches. So far as one can be happy at all. Do you remember Stevenson?"

"Stevenson?" He echoed her, perplexed.

"Yes. In the 'Vailima Letters.' He was writ-

ing to his friend. I think he made the supposition like this: 'Methought you asked me—frankly, was I happy? Happy (said I); I was happy once. . . . But I know pleasure still; pleasure with a thousand faces, and none perfect; a thousand tongues all broken; a thousand hands, and all of them with scratching nails'."

John Preston asked her, curiously: "Were you 'happy once'?"

Marion answered: "Never admittedly. Were you?" She could have taken back her words as a folly, remembering his prosperity and her recollections of the early days of his marriage. For some reason she was glad when he answered:

"I have only thought myself so."

She said, sagely: "That is to be happy." But to herself she added: "He married for love; it was a blunder, not a crime." She heard the hall clock strike and said hastily: "I must go in; good-night."

From the porch she watched him down the path, saw him pause to light a cigarette, and turned puzzled into the house.

She had offered her hand frankly in farewell and it had not been taken. Certainly it had not been purposely ignored, and yet . . . "After all," Marion argued, "one always shakes hands."

Walter was still waiting for supper, with rather a grim look. She ran up for a final look at Clare, restlessly tossing in her sleep, and then to summon Will from Lottie. All the time she remained preoccupied with something strange, and intangible as

strange, in Mr. Preston's manner. Why would he not shake hands?

IV

Lottie was pleased, even childishly pleased, when she heard the next day that Mr. Preston had walked over from Greyladies with Will. Marion said nothing that would tend to mitigate her pleasure and heard, without the least resentment, Lottie appropriating her friend for her husband. Only she wondered, with strange pangs, both at the quantity and quality of Lottie's pleasure. Lottie to whom, in but a few more days, nothing on earth mattered.

The nurse was installed and in charge when the end came, Marion engrossed in fighting for life with little Clare. She was called from the one bedside to the other: Will was there and Walter; the first cold beams of dawn in the room and a red rose leaning through the window and scattering its crimson petals on the floor.

Lottie murmured, faintly: "I didn't think yesterday that I should outlive that rose, Marion. One last petal . . . there!" She gave her fond smile to her husband and then with closed eyes added: "Don't knock yourself up nursing Clare, Mary. Nurse will be able to take on."

It had not been thought well to harass her with the truth that Clare's tenure of life seemed almost as slender as her own. The moments passed: hushed moments, marked by her breathing, but Lottie spoke no more. A final serenity set its seal upon her lips.

Marion must hasten back to her other patient, for the crisis was not yet over for Clare. Why should she strive to keep the child from her mother? Why did it seem so utterly urgent that Death should not claim one victim more? Marion felt she would lose hold on life herself if Clare's little limbs became stretched in death, and anxiety that Bobbie should escape infection throbbed in her bosom like a frenzy.

Bobbie had been sent with Phyllis to Greyladies the day after Mr. Preston's evening call. He had come next morning with an eager invitation from his aunt and Marion had gladly let Bobbie go, it seemed so plainly the wise and hopeful thing to do. She had only seen him from the window, since, coaxed to look up at her by Phyllis or Dorothea. Once or twice Miss Frances had called in her low fourwheel, and Mr. Preston had come every day.

Of the two households thus suddenly and intimately drawn together Miss Frances and Mr. John seemed to Marion the living and healing figures. Walter and Will were rigid unrealities, who watched her contest afar off—she fighting disease and death, and fighting, as it seemed to her, vainly and blindly.

Hours passed of necessity before the nurse came from her last attendance on Lottie to relieve her. She said to Marion, gently:

"I shall take on. I have sat up less than you."

Marion, unheeding, asked: "What do you think of her?" The nurse answered, wisely but quite

untruly: "She's out of danger. I've seen a lot of measles."

The measure of Marion's exhaustion was that she believed her. Her face relaxed. The nurse added, acting on a belief in hypnotic suggestion: "You will help most by going to bed."

She was relieved when Marion obeyed her and still more relieved when, an hour later, she entered her room to find her deep in sleep. Stepping quietly she did her best to steep the room in shadow. Rain fell softly: she thanked God that Clare was really a little better and Lottie permanently at rest.

WINTER

The Stuff of Life

I

At half-past two on a Monday afternoon in late November, Marion came downstairs dressed for a walk to Greyladies. There was a great regularity in her comings and goings, her well-ordered household proving to demand of her something of the precision of clockwork. So on Monday immediately after dinner she gave Kate what instructions were necessary in regard to the baker, the time for tea—which on this day varied to suit the men of the house—and any early preparations for supper. Then she changed her dress to ensure the right holiday feeling, and came down in time to say good-bye to the children and see them started for their afternoon outing.

Monday had become her regular day for Greyladies. She had fought against it at first as being too near Sunday, but Tuesday was Minterne market day and more often than not she must go in with Walter or Will, shopping. Wednesday was Kate's afternoon off and Thursday Phyllis's; on Friday Miss Frances was rarely free, while Saturday often meant Minterne again, so she had yielded to force of circumstances. The regularity of her Monday visit she liked, because it ensured her being ex-

pected, a thing she found almost as pleasant as Miss Frances found the expectation. And so Monday became the second happy day of the week.

For in spite of Will's scowls and Walter's objections Marion had made it plain to them that she claimed half, at least, of Sunday for her own, and the rule had come to be that she should drive back from church with Miss Frances to lunch at Greyladies and walk home in time to pour out tea at half-past four.

Marion had vivid memories of these Sundays and Mondays, contrasting sharply as they did with her busy, solitary life at Margaret's Mead. There was the sense of leisure and quietude; the happy, sympathetic intercourse with Miss Frances—the stimulus of a mind rich in experience, whose eager, acquisitive zest age could not stale. There were the long talks with Mr. John—when he could be got to talk. For oddly, strangely, as Marion thought at first, there were times when this friend, intimate and familiar as the place assigned to her at Greyladies made him seem, was less accessible, far less ready with word and smile, than Mr. John of Southbay.

On the other hand, speech from him, when it did come, was a thing to Marion of much rarer delight, so that the friendship of Southbay days came to seem to her, looking back, an incomprehensibly dry affair. And their companionship sprung a note of silence and of wordlessness—words became easily too many and too clumsy for thoughts conveyed swiftly, on a glance or smile, and understood with

the complete comprehension born of instinctive intimacy. Even Mr. John's withdrawals and inaccessibilities came to put on that air of particular intimate intercourse, as though in them he challenged, and challenging evoked, Marion's utter understanding.

She remembered, among their long talks, that in which he had told her of Walter, giving her the salient facts of his past as his aunt had reminiscently related them. Walter as a youth, a haunter of barns for gambling and boxing, of stables and inns for racing tips; the riotous promoter of cock fights and rabbit coursing—brutal pleasures of a past generation that linger and die hard in the remote countryside. Then the violent reaction—the very "street-corner conversion" of Lottie's jest; and restless energy in full career again; preaching, praying, intemperate advocacy of temperance and intemperate abstinence—strong drink, flesh foods, all representations of physical beauty, violently arraigned and violently eschewed.

And at last the too-quick cooling of too-hot fervour; the swing of the pendulum from narrow dogmatism to crudest unbelief; and the present and final product; the brutal violence of the first phase and the dogmatic bigotry of the second retained in the service of blatant Materialism, with Social Progress for its creed and Intellect for its god.

John Preston in his story did not fail to recognize the very human reason for Walter's transformations, portraying him at his worst as no more than bitterly reckless in his search for outlet for the energy that

was in him; belief and unbelief alike a fierce and glad acceptance of what most nearly expressed his changing conception of the truth. And for his best he could not but point out the swift, stark sincerity with which word and deed followed conviction. In whatever he chose to express he saw Walter Napier as a force to be reckoned with. Strong of will and of mind, of inexhaustible energy, with an insatiable thirst for the knowledge that is power and an unchanging determination to stand by his findings—here was a man to fear rather than to despise.

As John Preston talked it is conceivable that both he and Marion kept within their inward vision the picture of one brief, illuminating incident. An ugly untended hand that drew a book out of a row—a book bound in leather, of strong hand-made paper and fine letterpress—and the challenge of the gesture that threw all under their eyes. Then the harsh, arrogant rejoinder—

"Hardly useless . . . I never read translations." Doubtless Walter guessed that John Preston, as well as Marion, read for choice and pleasure in one language only.

It is not strange that Marion felt—and feeling, resented—John Preston's story as recommending Walter to her. Was he, indeed, endeavouring to paint him as desirable, pointing out to her his general eligibility? For she did not doubt but that Mr. John had heard, through Miss Frances, of Walter's pursuit of her.

And, of course, he had. Nor was Marion's

discernment in the least at fault. Quite stubbornly John Preston persuaded himself of the desirability of Marion's marrying Walter. He was wealthy (John Preston would have smiled at the account of his income Walter had chosen to give Marion), ambitious, far above the average of his class. A fanatic, an extremist, without culture, be it granted, but for all that a man of parts and a scholar, certain to go far. He took a grim and wilful pleasure in dilating on all this and watching Marion become irritated, disdainful, petulantly angry. Not for a glimmering moment of time did he glimpse the alternate attraction and repulsion that Napier had, in fact, for her. Not for one instant did he dream that any pulse of Marion's had leapt to an attraction she disowned. The girl had succeeded singularly in her woman's task of imposing on him the semblance of her seeming; helped by man's curious belief that the only women who are ever tempted are those who fall.

II

John Preston's commendations of Walter were, however, in the far background of Marion's thoughts on this Monday in November as she came down ready for her walk to Greyladies. The person uppermost at the moment was none other than Phyllis the nursemaid, whom she could hear making final preparations to take the children out.

Phyllis was a pale dark girl a few months younger than Marion. She was slight and graceful and in

the neat mourning black that Will had insisted on providing for the two maids looked refined and ladylike. Up to a few weeks back Marion had thought rather well of Phyllis, she seemed so thorough and capable, taking complete and careful charge of the two children and identifying their interests with her own.

But since then things had happened, and Marion was aware of waiting for her to come down with sensations of utter distaste and dislike. Phyllis was an inveterate gossip, a malicious scandal-monger; but Marion had always known it and perhaps idly encouraged her when her talk provided tit-bits to amuse Lottie. She was self-seeking and vain—Marion had sense enough to view such traits tolerantly, and was, moreover, a mistress consistently courteous and kind. Yet as presently Phyllis came down the stairs carrying Bobbie and chattering to him gaily, hostility and dislike were as patent in her face as in that of Marion waiting for her below.

Phyllis settled Bobbie in his pram, arranging everything nicely and only biting her lips a little when her charge sent a chuckling laugh and lisping word toward Marion. Marion bent over and kissed him with a gabble of the nonsense that children love. Then Clare had a lot to tell her, and without relaxing her indulgent smile for the children she asked Phyllis, concisely:

"Where are you taking them?"

"Along the Minterne Road, Miss, as far as Church Lane, and back by Zetlands."

Marion said quickly: "It is too muddy to come back by Zetlands."

Phyllis finished fussing with Bobbie and straightened herself with rather insolent deliberation: she carried her head well always: it was now very high.

"It is muddy, Miss," she agreed. "Mr. Walter told me to come back that way."

Marion bent to Clare. "Tell Uncle Walter it is his fault you are so dirty," she said, with a quite sweet smile as she kissed her. "Good-bye, sweetheart."

Clare hugged her round the neck, wildly disarranging her hair, while Phyllis waited with lamblike patience. Because the demonstration of ardent affection annoyed Phyllis, Marion encouraged it, though she wished to be neat. When at last they were gone her eyes and cheeks flamed with wrath. She said, vehemently: "It's abominable, abominable!"

She fastened her gloves viciously. The direction of her thoughts was made quite plain by an added:

"I should like to kill Walter!"

She started on her way.

III

Marion could have named the very hour in which, for her, Phyllis came out of the vague background of life to be woven, with startling effect, into its pattern. She had felt the queer surprise and faint resentment which usually greets that phenomenon. Some familiar figure, an employee, a shop-assistant,

a patient or a client, amazingly steps out of the place where it has played its accustomed part—worked to our orders, served us with hair-wash, detailed its ailments or stated its case—and essays to project itself into our lives as a being of passions, emotions, and claims like our own! We are amazed, an amazement tinged with resentment; failing to recognize that it is mainly the familiarity of the figure in another rôle that occasions our disconcertment. A stranger would not have achieved it. We meet him on a different footing, prepared for dull or interesting developments. But Jones who takes down our letters and wiggles his pencil when we pause for a sentence; the lady behind the bottles who dresses her hair so cutely; any one of the stream of patients who so irritatingly halt over obviously connected symptoms; Brown who becomes tempestuous over a claimed "right of way" or "ancient lights" and Phyllis whose part is so plainly to bathe Bobbie and look neat when she takes him out—how dare they suddenly encroach upon our lives, those vivid threads we work at so assiduously, and claim a share in making or marring the pattern?

It is odd that one has to make a nice distinction in this matter between, say, employer and employee or doctor and patient, and heaps of parallel cases. Almost a class distinction, at the mere mention of which we tremble. For the decisions of the employer and the doctor are usually too vital, too direct a factor in our lives to permit them to take on background colour. Moreover, they are single individuals—one doctor, one employer—not mere

members of a group, barely distinguishable from their fellows and thought of often in the mass as employees and patients are. They are unmistakably of the stuff of life, with direct and discernible reactions on our lives, and take their place accordingly. So much, at least, we accede to them. Hence Marion had never been to Phyllis an inconsiderable figure, and the jar of changed relations had been felt by her alone.

IV

It had all come about over a question of wages. Marion was engaged with Walter upon the accounts, a task she had come to share with him always, partly because she liked it and partly because it threw them into close contact. Walter had still for her something of the attraction of unexplored country—whatever she came upon was sure to savour of the unexpected.

On this occasion they had been trying to hit upon a simple scheme for separating household and farm accounts—not an easy matter, as things were managed at Margaret's Mead. Marion was inclined to think it mere hair-splitting at first, but Walter's unheeding persistence beguiled her, and she became as intent on the problem as he. These were their moments of expansive friendliness.

She came to the item of Phyllis's wages and paused upon it, thinking. Out of her thoughts she remarked to Walter, pointing to it:

"She is worth more. You will have to raise her wages."

"Sixteen pounds and her keep," mused Walter. "I don't think so. Why should I?"

"She is worth more," repeated Marion.

"Very likely," said Walter. "What has that to do with it? She is better paid now than any man on the farm."

Marion retorted his question: "What has that to do with it?"

He disregarded her.

"I should like to know which of the men could keep himself out of his wages as Phyllis is kept—housed and fed—and have sixteen pounds a year left——"

Marion interrupted him.

"Everybody knows," she remarked, "that agricultural labour is shamefully underpaid."

"Why 'agricultural'?" asked Walter. "Say labour as a whole and I'll agree. My men on even sixteen shillings a week, with no rent to pay and unlimited firewood and vegetables——"

"Are better off than the townsman at thirty shillings," concluded Marion. "I know all that. Though you shouldn't forget that firewood and vegetables have to be worked for." She stared at him straightly. "You get more than your share from the bargain."

"Do I?" He had the look of a man braced for enjoyable debate.

Marion put her hands to her ears. "Don't!" she said. "There's no need to stun me with arguments about the value of business brains, and interest on capital, and inducements for initiative

and investment, and competition of foreign markets —I know it all. And I still say labour is underpaid and the next social revolution will take place when labour sufficiently realizes it."

"Hear, hear," said Walter. "Quite an oration! A pity to preach to the converted."

"Converted!" retorted Marion, with contempt, and rapped the wages book smartly with her pen. "Converted, with this in front of us!"

Walter Napier's tanned face grew sardonic. "Shall I raise the scale throughout?" he asked. "I don't mind being unpopular, as you know. I think it highly probable I could get Garlogs on my own terms then. Brown has bother enough with his labour already. If they get more discontented and leave he'd never get new men to come to his cottages. And he nearly came to grief over the hay crop—he couldn't afford to put them in repair."

Marion answered: "I told you it would take a revolution to put things straight."

"And I agreed," Walter reminded her. "You also said it would take place when labour sufficiently realizes that it's underpaid. I'm doing my best to make it realize it. The problem's not to be solved by making exceptional cases. Find better housed and better paid men than mine if you can! Any more cheap sneers?"

"I often wonder," said Marion, "that we don't like each other better."

Walter glanced up quickly and suspiciously; Marion's face was calm. He answered, after a pause:

"I like you as well as I ever intend to. Shall I add anything to that?"

"No," said Marion. Walter recognized the fact that there was neither haste nor alarm in her voice. She added very deliberately but quite kindly: "Won't you give up the idea, Walter?"

The quality of her voice appealed to him, but so did her beauty. He hardened his face to brutality and stared at her steadily, hoping to see her eyes drop, but Marion did not quail. Failing in one direction he muttered, hoping to shock her:

"When you are dead, like Lottie."

But Marion hardly heard; she followed thoughts of her own to which acquiescence or refusal alone mattered. She gave a soft sigh and returned to her starting point with:

"What about Phyllis?"

He said, slightingly: "Why this anxiety?"

"She's a clever girl," said Marion, "and the children like her. It would be hard to replace her in the country. I happen to know she's had a better offer from the town."

"Has she?" said Walter, interested. "Who told you?"

"It reached the cook at Greyladies," Marion answered.

"I see. Do you like the girl?"

"Well enough," said Marion. "She's rather superior, don't you think so?"

It was on Walter's tongue to say that he had never particularly noticed her, but he changed his mind. He answered, rather slowly:

"Yes, I do."

Marion was surprised. She had taken Walter's indifference for granted. She was more surprised when after a minute or two he went on, haltingly:

"I knew her in her early 'teens. As a matter of fact, at that time, her eldest brother and I were thick as thieves."

"Were you?" said Marion. He shot a quick glance at her and noticed with satisfaction the distaste and disturbance momentarily visible in her face. She checked an inclination to ask if the situation had not been a trifle awkward.

"So you see," Walter went on, "I've rather avoided the girl. But I'll think about it. From many points of view I shouldn't like her to leave." A second glimpse of Marion's disturbance decided him. He concluded:

"I've got to make sure of someone for the kids."

Marion stood up. She replied, with her head high:

"That was my point."

V

Walter agreed to raise Phyllis's wages the next day, which pleased Marion in places. What did not please her was that he should seize an early opportunity of lingering beside the girl in the garden to say:

"By the way, how's Tom getting on in Canada?"

That was the beginning, but by now Marion looked back over a long vista of incidents, some slight and trivial enough, yet none the less surely

bringing about an utterly impossible situation. Walter openly following Phyllis's movements with his eyes and courting opportunities for casual speech with her; covertly watching Marion the while, but not so covertly that she failed entirely to perceive it; finding jobs for the girl that interfered with her set duties—mending for him, or docketing files, or labelling seeds in packets, or tidying the drawers of his bureau; amusing himself with the spectacle of Marion's resentment—the natural resentment of the mistress which she must none the less disguise or conceal, lest Walter should throw it back to her as jealousy, which he did not fail to do by look or gesture whenever Marion, to keep up the merest pretence of authority, was compelled to contravene his orders.

Phyllis, meanwhile, was inordinately flattered, stepping about at Walter's bidding with immense importance, and soon watchful for his glance or word or smile. Marion knew well the danger of the subtle flattery of a master's notice and was, betimes, intensely sorry for the girl, until concern was overlaid by utter dislike, born of Phyllis's insolent airs and temper and the intolerable position created.

The girl had not the wit to see herself as a decoy for Marion, though she had enough to be intensely jealous of her, and her attitude to her mistress became a constant insult.

More than once at first, wishing to preserve her from the folly of believing Walter serious, Marion had deliberately put herself about to please him.

He had responded, in his diabolical astuteness, with so much display that tongues were set wagging freely in the kitchen and Marion had the pleasure of knowing herself discussed as a competitor with Phyllis! To herself Walter made no secret of his attitude or purpose. Gradually but deliberately he had contrived to fill the blank in his life left by Lottie with the fierce desire for her sister. Not even to Marion did he name this passion love: he knew it to be unworthy of himself and her. But he let it sway him, acting on its suggestions and compulsions with so much of violence to his nature as kept him perpetually goaded by his pain.

His two brief utterances summed up both attitude and purpose: "Will you marry me?" and "I've got to make sure of someone for the kids." He knew Marion had grown to love them both devotedly and could not imagine her yielding them up to Phyllis, so he had caught eagerly at the opportunity of presenting her with that alternative to marriage with himself. For awhile he had been at a loss what to do to make his suit urgent; it had seemed easily possible that things might stay as they were for ever—indeed, he was aware of losing ground rather than gaining it. But now he had made the existing position intolerable for Marion. He waited for her next move.

Would Walter go so far as to marry Phyllis? That was only one of the questions Marion asked herself as she walked. The only possible answer to it was that in any event she must stay to watch the play no longer. To do so was to be dragged

unresisting through the mud. The Napiers were always impossible people!

To such decision another voice within her answered: "Then do you abandon Bobbie and Clare? Leave them to grow up with Phyllis's people, to catch Phyllis's accent, to have their horizon bounded by Phyllis's ideas! Lottie's children! And say good-bye for ever to Margaret's Mead?"

She answered that voice stubbornly: "It won't matter in the long run. Will is certain to marry again when he's got over his first stupor of grief. No action of mine would prevent that." Combatant forces within her answered: "You might exert some influence, though. Walter and you together would succeed in deciding the question of their education and upbringing."

Marion spurned herself for a hypocrite. She knew in her heart that she was not of the stuff to sacrifice herself for a questionable good; she knew that the problem for her was none of these things. It lay in the fact that she would take a long farewell of Greyladies when she left Margaret's Mead.

VI

Marion's mood finally turned from retrospection to the sheer joy of living at the sight of a dark pine standing in sunshine against blue sky. Since noon the weather had changed from soft warmth and misty rain to clear sunshine and fine, keen air, and throughout her walk glimpse after glimpse of arresting beauty had appealed against the dun colour of her worried retrospective thoughts.

Her pace slackened and lingered as she neared the pine that she might not too quickly pass it by. Colour, form, and contrast sharply impressed the eye. Marion was sensitive enough to all three to find mere consciousness, at times, too sharp a joy. Expression failed her; boundless gladness and expansive gratitude filled her mind wholly. Space seemed not wide enough to contain her joy and yet even the most inadequate expression was denied her. All she could do was to break inwardly into passionate Te Deums, into broken words of fervent thanksgiving—thanksgiving mainly for all consciousness and every sense that gave to her for her sure possession the beauty of the earth and all that therein is.

To-day the pine opened, besides, a store of memories, for she and Lottie had first revelled in its beauty as girls together. Her gladness, therefore, took even softer and deeper tones. She had in full measure the not uncommon consciousness of those beloved being often nearer in death than in life, and Lottie's buoyant hopefulness seemed about and around her, smiling at her anxieties about Bobbie and Clare and assuring her that all was well. For a few minutes of intense and quiet thought she held communion with her dead, while every beauty that the clear day held increased for her.

The high hedges were hung with the glossy black and green of berried alder; the hawthorn stretched wide boughs of red, dulled only by the flaunting scarlet of the hips; at their feet a myriad shades of green vied in the sunlight; a silver-fibred skeleton

leaf trembled on supporting blades of grass; near by a snail carried his striped spiral shell—frail, delicate, perfect in colour and design; gnarled roots, silvered with lichen, climbed the banks about; the woods through which Marion's path soon lay rested in a haze of amethyst and purple against the sky.

Entering their sun-flecked shade the beech leaves drifted red under her feet; a sweet fragrance stole from the rich brown soil. The bare, interlaced boughs formed an arch of delicate tracery above her head. She trod that aisle of fragrance and beauty in the happiest dream reverie that youth can know.

VII

Marion had in her mind as she walked a quite distinct and undoubting picture of what awaited her at Greyladies. Almost needless to say, she was wrong. Instead of a busily occupied, quietly expectant Miss Frances on one side of the hearth and a book-engrossed Mr. John on the other, Miss Frances sat with her thin hands idle in her lap and a flush of excitement on her cheeks as she talked to a tall lean man—even taller and much leaner than Mr. John—who stood with his back to the fire and his fine nervous hands clasped behind him.

Robert Preston was ten years older than John, but up to five years ago his only traffic in marriage had consisted of giving away to eligible husbands—mainly of his own providing—his numerous pretty sisters. Having creditably performed this duty he had at last turned what thoughts he could spare from his profession, his duties in the House of

Commons, and his hundred and one social fads and artistic hobbies to the selection of a wife for himself. His choice had pleased even the ladies who least desired him married: like every other act of his life his marriage seemed at once charming, graceful, and befitting. No higher compliment could be paid the natural ease and charm of the man than to add that after his long bachelorhood he was able, without the least effort, to impress people not only as the perfect husband but as the ideal father. He had now three children who seemed born to bestow on their parents happiness without a flaw.

It may be taken for granted after what has been said that Robert Preston required other and more flattering adjectives than lean and tall to describe him adequately. He had grace—an erectness of bearing, a fine backward swing of the shoulders and poise of the head that too rarely accompany slim length of limb. His features were good, and glance and smile both winning and humorous; neither years nor the faint silvering of his hair had power to make him look aught but gallant and young.

Miss Frances's eyes naturally held for him affection and pride, though their mutual attitudes conceded gladly the knowledge that John held first place with her. Robert was only staying some twenty-four hours; he would be gone on the morrow.

"It is simply a freak," he was telling Miss Frances. "John, who was formerly a reproach to us all for staidness, has suddenly become full of freaks. Can you explain it?"

"Do I believe it, rather," said Miss Frances,

indulgently smiling. "John has seemed to supply the sanest and soberest reasons."

"For going to South Africa?" questioned Robert. "Never! What are they?"

"Well," said Miss Frances, "health, for instance." She looked at John, smoking imperturbably, for support.

Robert glanced at his brother and laughed gently —a very kind but infinitely amused laugh.

"I dragged him off to Grayson myself," he said. "You know Grayson is a great chum of mine. He overhauled you pretty thoroughly, didn't he, John?"

"Too thoroughly," said John, "But spare yourself pains. I've told aunt all he said."

"As fit as a fiddle," summarized Robert.

"But he thought South Africa a good scheme," remarked Aunt Frances. She often amused her nephews by giving them back their phrases, with the most charming unconsciousness of their quaintness on her lips.

"Why shouldn't he?" said Robert. "John, you're a fraud. I never gloss over my freaks. Then this A.B.C. business."

John interposed calmly: "If you mean to christen that a freak I give in. George was bitten with the craze for retirement. He has no hobbies and he's only just over thirty. I *had* to find him something to do. Besides, it pays." Before Robert could reply he went on, ruminatively: "You ought to have nothing but gratitude for me. I wonder why it's so much more respectable to derive one's income from shares in a business without any

responsibility than from the whole concern, with all the responsibility."

"You see," said Robert, "he's sliding away from the point at issue."

"But I wonder," persisted John. He knew Robert would be beguiled.

"Quite easy," said his brother. "The shareholder invests the fruit of achievement; the shopkeeper is still trying to achieve."

"Really?" said John. "It doesn't matter, I suppose, if the achievement is not one's own?"

"Not in the least," retorted Robert. "I merely state a broad case, mention the underlying principle. There is only one measure of conduct, you know," he told Miss Frances. "Briefly, success."

John got up lazily. "I'll leave you to discuss my freaks in my absence," he said. He had a wish to meet Marion anywhere but under his brother's keen, kind eyes. As he went out Miss Frances said, with a vague perplexity gathering in her eyes:

"But there are business reasons for John's going, are there not?"

Robert turned to her to reply. From his look it was easy to anticipate an adherence to his designation of John's plan as a freak. But at the moment of speech he was arrested by Marion's step on the gravel path. John encountered her, in the event, almost exactly opposite the window; they exchanged greetings and turned to reënter the house together.

Robert asked Miss Frances, quietly:

"Who is the lady?"

"Mary," said Miss Frances. "Marion Harland. Did you not visit John when he was ill? Surely you must have met her at Southbay?"

"I think I did," said Robert Preston, slowly. Listening, he concluded that his brother would not reënter yet. He explained to Miss Frances in a deliberate, leisurely way:

"It is my joke about South Africa. I only wish John would take business more lightly; it's his failing to overwork systematically. None the less, it's a great relief to me that he's going. It would be difficult for me to go myself." He ended, vaguely: "There's the constituency, and Peggy, and the kids."

But Miss Frances was not deceived.

VIII

As she greeted Marion, receiving the soft pressure of the warm young lips on either withered cheek, Miss Frances had it in her mind that one glimpse of the girl's bright youth had been enough to silence the unquiet, formless questioning which she had begun to sense as the undernote and purpose of Robert's visit, and which she had found herself powerless to answer or explain.

Both words and manner had been light, but Miss Frances was not deceived. She knew her nephew well enough to judge from them that the maturing of John's plans to go to South Africa, possibly for good, had caused him surprise amounting to disquiet; an uneasiness so real that it had driven him to

make one of his rare visits to Greyladies to see if perchance the riddle could be read there.

Tentatively, laughingly, he had drawn her on the subject; tentatively and laughingly because he was too loyal to his brother not to fear giving him away. But he had made the mistake of thinking his aunt's perceptions as old as her years. The sight of Marion had answered his questions. Miss Frances's heart clamoured loud in her ears for the reason why.

Marion was looking her best to-day: exercise and fresh air had given a flush to her cheeks and a light to her eyes; her fair skin and bright hair rose in dazzling contrast from the soft dull black of her mourning wear. She looked so happy to-day—so young, so fair—Miss Frances felt her heart contract in pain at what, not quite for the first time, she was given to see.

All four people talked gaily, and perhaps of the four only Marion's gaiety was real. She remembered Mr. Robert quite well. At Southbay he had been of the Prestons who accepted her simply. Now, to her joy, he proved to remember her father and could tell her that a picture of his, purchased years before, had lately won unstinted admiration from connoisseurs. They talked at some length of her father—the man of varied and unequal talents, unstable as water, now poet, now artist, now seer. Mr. Robert was very skilful in winning confidence, very charming. He exerted his skill to-day: it remained for Miss Frances to detect that he was attentive almost to preoccupation, too.

Into the background of her thoughts she thrust the pertinent question: "If not for business and not for health why should John leave England?" with its hateful answer: "For strong ills, strong remedies," and into that dim background thrust a thousand resurgent thoughts and memories, too. But problems of her own youth rose again, unsolved, and mocked her. She tried to turn deaf ears to them, or to murmur, as of old: "Hush, hush."

When tea was over she and Marion were left alone awhile. Marion had arranged that the trap should be sent for her as usual at half-past six. Immediately the two women reverted to intimate personal talk, Miss Frances with a gentle:

"Are things shaping better in regard to Phyllis?"

Marion shook her head. "I have no hope that they will," she said. "After all, why should they? So of course they grow worse." She smiled awry. "I suppose it means that I must leave," she conceded, with a sigh. "After all, Bobbie and Clare would not be mine for ever."

Miss Frances smiled a little. "Why are you always so sure your brother-in-law will marry again?" she asked.

"Why shouldn't he?" asked Marion. "He's not of the material that lives anywhere but in the present." She considered her own speech. "Few of us are; and those not the happiest."

"Would your sister have married again?" asked Miss Frances, softly. She was surprised when Marion answered with wide eyes, unpausing:

"Surely. Of course she would." After a minute she asked: "Are you surprised?"

"I am at your taking it for granted," said Miss Frances. "Youth usually looks upon second marriage with distaste. One of its fond illusions."

"At eighteen, perhaps," said Marion, amused. "I am twenty-four."

"Then at twenty-four one admits the possibility of second love," hazarded Miss Frances.

Marion looked speculative, looked eager. "If we're quite candid with ourselves," she submitted, "we surely believe in more than that. It seems to me I've been in love, more or less, dozens of times already. Of course that's perhaps because no single love has what one might call matured. But if it had, does it follow that all one's capacity would be used up in one experience? It might be, of course. I don't know."

Miss Frances laughed. "How modern!" she said. "And how refreshingly candid!"

Marion said, unsmiling: "But isn't it true?"

"I was wondering," said the older woman, speculatively, "how one would find room for love tragedies, on those lines?"

"Oh," said Marion, "it makes more room. One would feel as one does with recurrent illness—to have pain like this and endure it and then live to have it again! No, don't laugh. I'm not laughing. After all, each loss is its own loss, no new gain makes it less, and can be suffered in memory over and over again. I think our human need of love is appalling, when one thinks of its risks. One is not

asked to go through life desolate because one love has passed onward, but yet——"

"Marion," said Miss Frances, gently, "have you never dreamt of a love for which your heart would be a shrine?"

Instantly she was sorry she had said it. She saw in a moment how young the girl was and how secret even to herself were kept her heart's deep recesses. On the top the frothy generalities about things that bear talking of, and beneath, jealously guarded, feared, shunned, denied. . . .

The sudden whiteness of Marion's face shocked her. She saw the knuckles of the girl's clenched hand gleam white in the glancing flame light. A strained voice answered her:

"Dear Miss Frances, I cling to the hope and the prayer that it is impossible to love like that."

Miss Frances took the measure of Marion's capacity for suffering.

IX

It was Marion, anxious to efface the effect of her involuntary self-revelation, who blindly and blunderingly stumbled upon the topic of divorce. Groping in her mind for things with which to overlay her last too-truthful utterance, she knit this talk to one with Lottie of a former day. The probably contrasting points of view struck her. She said to Miss Frances:

"You would be no believer in divorce?"

Her friend's face quivered and changed: she had

a wish that she had not embarked upon these shoals. She asked, a trifle sadly:

"Why not?"

"I imagine," said Marion, "since you think second marriage wrong, you might see no sense to it. Lottie maintained that apart from re-marriage there was none."

"If I thought second marriage wrong, which I am very far from doing, I certainly should see no sense to it," said Miss Frances, unwisely.

Marion laughed rather drearily. "Then I suppose I *am* a fool," she said. "Lottie told me so, in just so many words." Because her friend's look invited it, she told her the story.

Miss Frances had her own appreciation of it, but she said, kindly: "I will go so far with Lottie as to say that I don't think I could advocate divorce as a mere vindication of honour. Don't quarrel with my adjective—one's standing with the world *is* a trifle. How one stands toward one's self and God, that is all that matters."

"God!" said Marion, low. Miss Frances knew she had in her mind the modern multitude who question His existence.

"God," she repeated. "Goodness, if you prefer it. Or one's ideal of conduct. Every man has such a God, deny it though he may."

The door was opened quietly and Miss Frances put out a hand and drew a chair nearer the fire. She said:

"Come and join us, Robert."

It was John's voice that answered: "What is

the subject?" The two men came over to the fire.

Marion was startled to hear Miss Frances reply, quite simply:

"Religion and divorce. Which do we go on with, Marion? I think divorce was the first hare started."

"Then we'll take the second," said Robert. "Do we want lights?"

Lights were vetoed. Mr. John kicked a smouldering log into flame and threw on another. Robert took up his characteristic attitude by the fire and asked Marion if he might smoke.

"Now, then," said he, "where were we?"

"Marion has a weakness for eliminating creeds," said Miss Frances. "I am not clear about Deity, but I am sure about creeds."

"In the present instance I think I did no more than remind myself of the number of people, very much concerned with morals and ethics, who do not concern themselves with Deity," Marion answered, colouring slightly.

"Have no use for Him, in short?" said Mr. Robert, in an ambiguous tone. "Have you none, Miss Harland?"

Marion took a long look at him as the flames danced and flickered; she perceived that the light tone accompanied the darkened eyes of a man who sees dear convictions threatened. She glanced from Robert to Mr. John in some appeal.

"You must take another turning, Robert," said his brother. "Your 'in short' entirely misinter-

prets everything Mary said or thinks. Shall we substitute another word for 'God' or 'Deity'?"

"Mary generally prefers 'good'," said Miss Frances.

Robert repeated it, pondering.

"A cold abstraction," said he. "Do you reject the life and warmth and emotion of personality in your highest good?"

Marion said, quickly, "I don't. And yet I think we gain something if we think of God less as an individual and more as an all-pervading, all-pitiful good; a constant and availing aid to every impulse toward righteousness—at once surrounding and indwelling. I'm afraid that is a very stumbling expression of what I mean."

"And then creed?" said Robert. No man quicker to take eagerly, avidly, the tone and colour of any company worth while. "At least I am right in understanding Aunt Frances to say that you like to eliminate creeds?"

"I leave one," said Marion. Her face took the flushed softness of earnest thought. She turned to Mr. John. "How do we condense it? Love God, love neighbour."

For pure pleasure in the measured utterance of beautiful words Robert repeated them softly. They thrilled through the silent, firelit room.

"'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.' This is the first and great commandment.

"And the second is like unto it: 'Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.'"

"I sometimes think," said Marion, after the hush of silence that followed the resonant tones of Robert's mellow voice was broken, "I sometimes think that a sufficient rule of life is found in the second."

Mr. John said, quickly: "No; no."

"It is service, it is sacrifice, it is self-fulfilment," said Marion, quickly. "To love one's neighbour as one's self—with sympathy, with complete understanding."

John surprised her by emphasizing his negative.

"To love God, to love good, is highest," he said, firmly, "and is alone sufficient."

"But is it not involved in loving one's neighbour?" said Robert. "Think. A life of love and sympathy and kindness."

John said, smiling: "Think again."

After a brief following silence he went on, quietly: "I shall express it haltingly, but I look at it like this. I grant you the much of loving one's neighbour. But when one has imagined the service and love and sympathy, there is something a little material in the end. One has helped one's neighbour to material, physical, and mental good, let us say. Refrained at all times, according to our light, from doing him harm. Improved his conditions, made life more than tolerable to him, made it so far happy. Is that at all comparable to the aspiration of the man who sees good as an end in itself, who does all that incidentally, because it is good; who has formed a conception of God—of goodness—which he loves with all his

strength and all his mind, and unto which he unceasingly aspires?"

The words had gathered emphasis from the very quietude of their utterance, deliberate, earnest, and low. After a pause Robert said:

"I see that. Question whether loving one's neighbour is even imperfectly possible without that vision of God."

X

Marion did not go back to Margaret's Mead in the trap that evening. When it came for her Mr. John sent it away with the message that he would drive her home after dinner, some time between nine and ten. He came back into the house to say that it was a hard frost, the trees covered with rime, and forthwith Robert would have them troop out to the porch to see the silver fringe of the garden trees and the giant cedar spreading wide arms to the moonlit sky. So back gladly to the warm, light drawing room, where lamps were lit at last and the deft maid had brushed the white-tiled hearth, piled the fire anew with logs and peat, and set the card table near Miss Frances's chair.

"Is it to be bridge or talk?" Miss Frances asked, and smiled with pleasure when the popular voice decided against cards. In a little while the small circle had split in two, she discussing politics with Robert while John had drawn Marion aside over a recent book.

"I have something to ask you," he said to her

presently. "You know, of course, that a branch manager is already appointed at Southbay?"

"Yes," said Marion. "Why?"

"I gather from Aunt Frances that you are not feeling very settled at Margaret's Mead—is that so?"

"I have been telling Miss Frances to-day that I don't think I can stay," said Marion. Again she asked: "Why?"

Mr. John smiled. "I suppose I mustn't make use of that word in my turn," he said, "though I should like to. However, here is my reason. The A.B.C. is spreading out its arms fast and we're establishing another branch at Wyemouth. Would it interest you? There's a quite competent though rather old foreman who would do well in the bakehouse; you would have no worry there. Of course I don't ask for a decision now, any time before Christmas. Aunt Frances favours it because she hopes you would spend most of your week-ends with her here. It is quite near enough for that." He hesitated a moment, then said, firmly:

"You see she will be rather lonely when I am gone."

Marion echoed: "Gone?"

He smiled. "Greyladies has almost completed my cure. I've spent most of the week in London for some time now. And certainly work has its charms for me. I couldn't be an idler here for ever."

"Of course not," said Marion. Her heart was throbbing painfully. "But do you mean that you

are returning to London for good? That you won't live at Greyladies any more?"

He could not but notice how entirely her thoughts were diverted from her own plans to his. His voice and look softened.

"I should mean that," he said, "if I did not mean more. Greyladies was never meant to be more than a rest cure—it is too far from London for a permanent home. But as a matter of fact, I am leaving England. Partly for business reasons and partly for health. I am going to South Africa."

XI

Marion could not believe—could not comprehend or contend with—her own instant rush of emotion. Nothing she had consciously thought about Mr. John, nothing she had even for a moment realized him to mean to her, could credibly account for the fact that at his words the soft-lit room turned to a black void before her eyes. She did not know that Miss Frances and Mr. Robert still talked, their voices mingling in a low monotone, that she herself continued her restless play with a paper knife she was handling—for appreciable moments of time she knew nothing. Then she saw that she was bending the knife and laid it absently down as Mr. John added:

"I'm not sailing in the next boat, you know. As a matter of fact, I hope to stay here until Dorothea returns to school after the Christmas holiday. She will not come out to me for another year or two. I

have arranged to go about the second week in February."

Marion caught her breath, repeating his words mechanically, the wildest resentment, and pain, and hatred surging in her breast. She hated him at that moment fiercely for his power so carelessly and callously to hurt her. What did it matter that it was done unconsciously? She suffered torments! She heard herself saying, hardily and casually, but as from a distance:

"Another year or two! You are going, then, for good?"

He answered, in an odd voice:

"I hope . . . for good."

The tone made Marion look up quickly, surprised, and the first wave of pure selfishness in her emotion broke. Passionately resentful, miserably wounded, she had contrasted, subconsciously, what she first found of calm, kindly friendliness in his voice with the wild despair of her heart. Then it sprang that new note; she sped her glance to his face, and momentarily, at least, her pain was eased. For against his will and knowledge John Preston's face by no means looked as though he had spoken calmly. It was, to Marion's intense surprise, gray and shocked.

She looked away, striving with all her might to rally her senses, to receive his news as it was meet she should receive it. She remarked, with a would-be natural interest:

"Let me see, in Africa you have very cold nights after very hot days, don't you?"

"I believe so," said John Preston. He closed the book they had been discussing, reflecting, with his twisted smile, that in realistic fiction people express emotion by calling out, "My God!"

XII

In the short time before dinner spent in Miss Frances's cosy dressing room Marion reverted to their former talk. She had to speak of something to keep her thoughts from centring on one subject prolific of pain.

"I don't think I am inconsistent," Miss Frances replied. "You quote against me my mention of a love for which one's heart would be a shrine. That certainly does seem to commit me to a difficulty in understanding second marriages. I admit it. But from another point of view than yours."

"Tell me," said Marion. She knit her brows, less in perplexity than from difficulty in concentrating for two minutes together on any subject but one.

"The second marriages I cannot understand," said Miss Frances, talking in despite of her knowledge that her words were probably wasted on air, "are those you accept casually. I mean those following an obviously and confessedly happy first marriage. That divorced people should marry again seems to me the most natural thing in the world."

Marion was quite arrested. She said eagerly: "Why?"

"Why? Because if I had built a shrine to an

idol, and found it false," said Miss Frances, whimsically, "I should almost certainly want to find a true one. The fact of building a shrine at all demonstrates a taste for idols, you see. To translate, the fact of loving one man as a husband proves some need and desire for one. If he proves false, or impossible, or utterly unworthy, surely it is natural to wish to retrieve that false step, natural to be prone to love again? The people who marry unhappily are altogether desolate, cheated, and deprived; the thing they asked of life denied them; their love thrown back, unwanted, undesired. No such claim can be made by your partner to a happy union, whose love is divided from him only by death."

"*Only* by death," repeated Marion, strangely.

"Do you believe in the immortality of the spirit?"

For one moment Marion hesitated. Then experience flooded her mind with memories. She answered, quickly; "Oh, I do. I do."

"Then what is death to love but a communion closer, sweeter? I grant you anguish and loss at first, the miss of every human attribute we loved and knew. . . . But perhaps you see why second marriage following death is a little incomprehensible to me. I realize, of course, the truth contained in what you said just now, that each loss is its own loss; a second wife or husband need in no sense replace the first; each needed, each beloved. But it is certain that a divorced man's second marriage needs no excuses."

Marion quoted: "Whom God hath joined."

"Ah," said her friend, "but who shall say whom God has joined? Don't let us confuse a ceremony and a priest with God."

Marion said, deliberating: "But you don't believe in indiscriminate divorce?"

"My dear child!" protested Miss Frances. "I was only defending the right of a divorced person to marry again. Of course I believe in wise, sane safeguards of the sanctity of marriage; I believe in regarding it as a responsibility and obligation only for the gravest reasons to be set aside. But the abuses of the present system degrade marriage. I see neither sanctity nor decency in binding a pure-minded woman to an adulterous man, or either sex to a partner irredeemably immoral, drunken, or insane."

After a pause she added:

"And what is horrible in my sight I think can be no less so in the sight of God. Nor would I condemn the partners to such unions to an unnatural celibacy. The punishment is too heavy for the crime."

Marion remarked, on a slightly ironical note:

"Unnatural celibacy must be the lot of a good many women, anyway."

"I know," said Miss Frances, and smiled, too. "That does not make it less unnatural. But it may be said for the unmarried of either sex that as a rule they haven't found a partner; they're not compulsorily kept apart."

"And I suppose," said Marion, with careful

casualness, "you regard Mr. John, for instance, as morally free?"

Miss Frances admired the tone. She reflected that avoidance of the pertinent conclusion must have seemed marked. She answered:

"No. I believe in 'rendering unto Cæsar.' I believe in obeying the law. Were he lawfully free he would be morally so. But he is not. No act is right or wrong in itself; attendant circumstances make it so. Am I clear, Marion?"

She was rejoiced that the reply halted. Marion considered; the older woman pictured her calling up parallel cases. At last:

"Perfectly. And perfectly right," said Marion. "But——"

"What becomes of my text and sermon? you are wondering," added Miss Frances. "I believe in getting bad laws altered."

"What can one do?" asked Marion.

"For one thing, take pains to think clearly, and particularly consider other people's problems more than one's own. Robert may be keen in reform of the divorce laws, but John hardly can. How would he know that the personal issue was not perverting his judgment?"

They were standing ready to go down. Marion remarked, musingly:

"I wonder if that is why divorce is mostly discussed by the unmarried?"

Miss Frances laughed. "My dear," she said, "I might suspect a hit at me. You are too young to be classed yet."

Marion turned to her, impulsively, half amused, half apologetic. Miss Frances took her arm to go downstairs.

"But I am going to prove you wrong," she said. "I don't follow my own counsel of perfection. With me it was once a very personal problem. You see I have been married nearly fifty years."

Before Marion had collected herself to reply she added, quickly:

"There's the bell. And in any event, I had no present intention of telling you the story."

They paused on the landing of the first short flight of stairs.

"I'm growing a garrulous old lady," finished Miss Frances. "Now you know why Robert chose the second hare."

XIII

Marion referred to the South African project at dinner and was amazed to find that Miss Frances had heard nothing of it until that morning, or such casual and fragmentary mention as to make no impression on her. Mr. Robert had known, of course, for some time, and contrived to keep the conversation, which tended to centre round Africa, amusing and interesting from the fruits of his own previous experiences there.

As undercurrent to the apparently quiet, pleasant talk Marion found her sense of desolate trouble and pain returning, and recognized with a sort of dumb dismay that in such guise it might return to stay. In its first acute form of sense-destroying misery

she had told herself desperately that it could not last, because it could not be borne, and the assurance brought its own wretched consolation. But a numb, desolate ache such as now supervened could be carried concealed, she feared, for ever. One could live on top of it—smile, and talk, and live!

John Preston watched her anxiously but covertly as the time stole by, considering his plans sealed and ratified by every trifling thing observed of Marion, as well as by his own emotions. Not for a moment could he forget the wild exultation, swiftly caught and strangled by iron hands of self-control and self-condemnation, that had leapt into being within him when at his first carefully casual words her face had blanched white. He had not been prepared for it. He had not thought—if he had hoped—that she would so much care, and for his own strengthening he had thought it well that she should expect him to pass out of her life. Now the remembered agony of her young face whipped him with whips that flayed and healed; an exquisite torture, keeping the nerves alive and quivering.

For all that he must experiment with his own sensations, test his power of self-control, essay to prove he had not been deluded in the nature of what he had observed. So Marion found herself involved in discussion of the Wyemouth proposal, envisaging the average tea-shop—the pretentious decorations, the banal music above the clatter of crockery and the buzz of voices; the changing vista of crumby plates and sloppy saucers; the sameness and nameless vulgarity of mankind feeding in the

mass. She saw herself observant of the needs, the tastes, the comments of these changing crowds; viewing waitresses and assistants in relation to them; reconciling the hundred pettinesses of a vain, overtired, and underpaid staff; calculating to-morrow from to-day.

Would she be able to bring individuality into such a scheme? Could taste and strong resolve impart distinction to what depended for its existence on the support of crowds? John Preston maintained that it could and would, and that the century-old premises at Wyemouth peculiarly lent themselves to a quiet note of old and mellow dignity, fragrant of the romance of a bygone age. It had a garden sloping to a river for summer teas; workmen already overran the house transforming it under the eye of the great "period" decorator, Mainwaring himself. Mr. John wished her to meet him and confer upon details on the spot.

This was part of their after-dinner talk, in which Miss Frances joined while Mr. Robert resumed attention to his voluminous correspondence. And Marion, with the mingling of discernment and candour that Miss Frances loved in her, thanked her sweetly for the opportunity given to her of at least presenting Walter with a definite alternative. In her heart she knew she hated business, just as she loved the ordered usefulness of her present life. She wished aloud that she had been born in days of less communal living.

"Every home an exaggerated counterpart of the more isolated farms?" said Mr. John. "The lot

has its advantages. Come with me to Africa. I'll forego accountancy and mines and we'll experiment together."

The teasing tone almost banished Miss Frances's fears. She thought: "He could not venture safely on such a jest!" In the next moment she saw that indeed he did not venture safely. A burning question flashed into his eyes, which fortunately Marion's were not raised to meet.

John also, it seemed, made the mistake of imagining his aunt's perceptions as old as her years.

XIV

When Marion had gone and the household had separated for the night Miss Frances sat long over her fire anxiously pondering the wisdom of what she had said and left unsaid. She knew Marion well and that the innate purity and delicacy of the girl would interpret her generously and on right lines. But had she succeeded in her object? Had interference at all been necessary or wise?

What she had wished—what she still wished, prayerfully—was that Marion should not be confronted by a problem unawares: that it should not come to her—unconsidered, undreamt of—in some moment of passion and pain. But had she sufficiently emphasized that first duty of submission to the law? Had she made plain the distinction she wished to draw between the mere death of the physical body and the actual death in life of the soul?

Miss Frances hardly paused upon her brief men-

tion of her own story, though she knew it was a tale that must now be told. She had wished to account for her interest, in case Marion's thoughts were free enough to lead her to speculate thereon; also she had wished to divert the girl's thoughts from one sole problem. It had been an effort and a sacrifice. Was it thrown away?

Presently, against her will, she began to frame the telling of that old tale so that it might best illustrate the truth she wished to press while leaving herself and Marion little hurt.

"The English law does not grant divorce to a woman for mere adultery; neither can one plead desertion when one pays a man to keep away."

She thought of those months in India; of her first blind idealization; of her later refusal to bear a dishonoured name. And so the passing of years and the blurring of her story; by most people long forgotten. She thought of the love of her maturer years and its starved agony. She murmured to herself, on a painful smile: "Hush, hush."

All the arguments against recent suggested reforms of the marriage law passed through her mind in procession. She viewed them—now in her old age—with a white flame of passionate anger. The dishonest pretence that under the desertion clause a man might marry again and again by the simple process of marrying a wife one day and deserting her the next! The fatuity of the supposition that any sane man would spend long years of his life in fulfilling the stipulated periods of desertion—that an immoral man would worry overmuch about re-

peating marriage at all! Then the hypocrisy of accepting separation and refusing divorce, as though separation was not a putting asunder. The limiting of Christ's "except for fornication" to the man, because in His day the question was not raised as to the woman. The unfair double standard with its manifest results and all the old, silly, smothering, ostrich-like policy of believing that not to see is to make invisible.

Other aspects of the problem—the dire results to the race of keeping women bound in wedlock to undesirable men; the failure of realism when depicting vice ever to suggest its horrible physical results, as though evil brought no consequences; the insincerity toward morals, the weak and pitiful treatment that corrodes the national life—these presented themselves to her in turn and filled her with longing to be young again, that she might take her part in the work to be done in a quickly coming time.

GOOD-BYE

I

ON A clear cold morning in January Marion spent long hours in the attic where apples were stored. It was bitingly cold there, as she found in spite of haste and energy, for a north wind blew through the unceiled roof and in at the ill-fitting leaded lattices, and she varied her task of looking over the fruit for those that showed signs of rotting by sundry runs to the warm kitchen to thaw over the fire. Kate was baking and produced a hot cake and warm milk on one of her calls, saying, persuasively:

"It's far too cold for you up there, Miss. Let them bide till to-morrow and I'll get James to come up with me and finish them in no time."

"It is rather cold," admitted Marion. "They have to be handled gently or they'll bruise. There are quite a heap of throw-outs, but I'll finish them now I've begun."

"Are you dressed warm enough, Miss?" asked Kate. She cast a contemptuous look at Marion's thin silk blouse.

"I'm going to put my coat on," said Marion. "Clare helped for a little while, sweet mite. Her little hands got quite blue and I sent her down."

She seemed in high spirits and it was odd to see

how anxious were Kate's eyes as she followed her into the hall and helped her into her thick coat.

"How long are you likely to be, Miss?"

"Less than an hour," said Marion. "If Mr. Walter comes in ask him to send up for the rotten ones. There are too many for me to bring down."

She ran up the back stairs. Kate, looking out, saw Walter about to enter the yard next the paddock. She put down her spoon and ran out to him.

"Miss Marion says would you send up for the apples for the pigs?" she said. "She be up there sorting them in this north wind."

Walter followed her in without a word. He picked up a basket and turned to the back stairs. At the foot he paused to ask:

"How long has she been up there?"

"Hours on end," said Kate. "What we want to store so many apples for is beyond me. And she've asked for someone to look them over every day this fortnight past. I'll warrant she might have asked for a fortnight more——"

Walter stopped for no more of Kate's harangue. "That woman's tongue wants cutting," he muttered as he went upstairs. He paused in the doorway of the attic to watch Marion unobserved.

She was absorbed in her task and she sang as she worked. But there was no need of the sharpness of Walter's anxious glance to perceive that she looked thin and worn. Cheeks and temples were hollowed and the face had lost its look of soft, round youth. The resemblance to Lottie had deepened, making it easy to trace the source of Walter's fear.

He shuffled his feet on the landing before saying aloud:

"Here's the basket. It's too cold for you up here."

Marion pointed to a heap on the floor. "There they are," she remarked, absently. When Walter had begun to fill his basket she added:

"I want to tell you that I'm sorry about Phyllis."

Walter straightened himself from his stooping and stared at her as he asked, deliberately:

"Sorry she's going?"

"No," said Marion, "I did not mean that."

Before she had time to say what she did mean Walter went on in his remorselessly logical way:

"Will asked her to do something or other. She was rude to him. He gave her a month's notice. What that has to do with me for the life of me I can't see."

"I thought—Will thought, too, I expect—that you were very friendly with Phyllis."

"So with brotherly kindness he discharged her," sneered Walter. "Am I to take your sorrow as divine compassion for Will's brutality?"

Marion turned impatiently away. She had felt some concern that Walter's interest in Phyllis should seem to be flouted. By a change made at the New Year in the household affairs of Margaret's Mead Phyllis now came directly under Will's employ. She would have dismissed the subject, which had ceased to interest her, but Walter was determined to make his case clear.

"It puzzles me why you and Will should imagine

you have landed me in a predicament," he said, in a voice of contempt for their discernment. "Assuming I had a serious interest in Phyllis I have only to assert it, and I fancy Will and you would be the subjects for compassion. Assuming I have not, you surely do me a kindness in ridding me of her." After a hard look at Marion's face of distaste he ended: "You can hardly be blind to the fact that she's a nuisance to me."

Marion answered, indifferently: "I only remember you were quite familiar with her some few weeks back." She resumed her sorting of the apples.

Walter flushed swarthily as he, too, set about his task. He thoroughly believed her. Marion's indifference was, indeed, the key to the new situation in regard to Phyllis. Miss Frances's intervention with the Wyemouth plan had indeed done much, as she had foreseen it would. Walter feared to drive Marion to extremities and instantly saw Phyllis as a weapon turned against him. But he would have made some play in that direction if Marion's complete indifference had not supervened. Some subtle change had come over the girl; he found that no look or word of his had power now to move her. She received all and anything with a cheerful, quiet, abstracted calm that neither hurt nor healed. She discussed the Wyemouth scheme frankly, even luring him to weigh its pros and cons with her, and finally just at Christmas decided against it. But Walter felt no longer sure of her. At any moment, on some change of view, she might

go. He recognized that for the present his own case was hopeless. Restraining his impatience, he waited.

II

Marion soon forgot that Walter was in the room. A little while later, when she found that he was sorting apples near her, she did remark that kneeling on the floor in the cold made one stiff, but she withdrew almost immediately into her perfectly unconscious preoccupation. It was not mere torpid abstraction but a vivid, exciting preoccupation that kept her movements swift, her low song constant, her cheeks flushed.

And indeed she had been for two months vividly and intensely living; most of the time with her senses on the alert to guard, conceal, and defend her thoughts. Miss Frances's wish to forewarn her had signally succeeded, though she knew it not. Marion had tossed her problem back and forth, felt it, probed it, imagined she knew it inside and out.

But indeed she did not; for there were times when she imagined that John Preston was impatient of her; did not even like her. There were times when she believed profoundly that if he came to love her the evil of final separation would be spared her as an ill too great. There were times—less frequent—when she dreamed of a declaration of love from him which would give them as friends to each other for all time.

Always when she pictured this last development she saw John Preston's sojourn in South Africa

cancelled, or shortened to a year merely; always, thereafter, she met him constantly—at Greyladies, or at the branch of the A.B.C. where she happened to be. Her refusal of the Wyemouth management was a mere symptom of the first blow given to this dream.

She had been discussing with him some detail in regard to the books and had remarked, casually and thoughtlessly:

"After all, if the point arises when you are gone you could write me about it."

Instantly the kindness, the intimacy went out of John Preston's face as the brightness from a window when the light within is extinguished. He said, smiling but aloof:

"We won't trust to that. I am a very bad correspondent."

Marion was taken off her guard. Not for a moment had she doubted that they would write to each other. She said like a child, impulsively:

"But you will write to me?"

He replied, quite kindly: "Of all my relations I only write to Aunt Frances."

Marion knew, as he knew she must, that that was not true. She became suddenly silent. Then she remembered what she must do, and took up the ball of conversation again and tossed it merrily. Being human, John Preston compassionated that brave gaiety, and became heart-breakingly kind.

Then, too, Marion had counted confidently on regular weekly meetings at Greyladies during the remainder of his stay in England. But more

often than not she reached Greyladies to find him away, or on Sundays was apprised by Miss Frances's solitude in church of his absence. And more than once after such disappointment he called on her unexpectedly in the middle of the week with a book or message. Marion's expectation was kept constantly alive: not a day passed but she expected him: not a day but she checked off as one the less of the rapidly decreasing days on which she could even hope to meet him.

The visit to the Wyemouth branch she had pictured taken in his company and looked forward to as a day of pure pleasure; but in the event George Preston came over to fetch her with Rosa. This was planned, it appeared, as a surprise and treat for her! Marion spent the day in breathless gaiety, and Wyemouth was a hateful place to her thereafter; during every moment spent there she whipped herself with whips of self-scorn and angry, contemptuous humiliation.

Yet it was at Wyemouth she first took to herself the cold comfort of blaming the iniquity of the law for what she suffered and immediately saw her lot impersonally, and smarted with indignation as at a public wrong. For had John Preston been free she knew she would have scorned to lie smarting under his treatment; would indeed have scorned its varying tones and hues and him for being capable of it. As it was she for ever traced it to its source, read into it varying meanings, torturing herself with the bare possibility of his pain and feeding her love with compassion.

Of course she had moments of healthy impatience when she could say and feel, raging at herself: "Oh, don't be such a fool. It is all hateful and ugly together. What matter if he cares or not? Is it likely he would be such an idiot as to care? And if he does he must just get over it and dismiss it, and so must you. Trust him to do that and do it yourself." Then she would throw herself heart and soul into work or play, frolicking with the kiddies or enthusiastically weeding out the atrocities in the oak room, and in less than an hour would be back at the old game again, conscious of renewed defeat.

So in fluctuations of feeling, in struggle, in vain speculation, and above all in a fever of desire to keep that inward conflict hidden or disguised, the weeks passed. On the whole, she did well. If the intensity of her inner life preyed on her health, as it must and did, even Walter's watchfulness failed to diagnose the cause. He saw her often gay, always self-sufficient, flushed of cheek, bright of eye. He remembered that so had been Lottie, and wasted as Marion wasted, denying as Marion denied that she was ill. Walter grew grim, but no longer pressed attentions on her nor sought in any way to harass or fret.

III

The fact that kept Marion peculiarly preoccupied to-day was that she expected to say a final farewell to John Preston when she left Greyladies in the evening. It appeared, incredibly yet so naturally,

that nothing was to happen. He left for London the next day and it was not expected that in the press of business before sailing he would find time to visit Greyladies again.

He sailed in a fortnight's time, Marion knew almost to an hour when he would leave English shores. All the morning she had been feverishly contemplating the morrow, trying to imagine how it would feel to know she would see him no more.

Walter, stolidly finishing the last heap of apples, and kneeling close by her side to do it, remarked at last:

"Do you know that there is a note for you downstairs, brought over from Greyladies?"

Marion dropped a sound apple. She bit her lip as she put it on one side to take down with her. She said:

"No, how should I? It ought to have been brought up to me."

"Sorry, it's my fault," said Walter. "I took it in and meant to tell Kate. But I expect it's to tell you that Preston's gone."

"Gone?" repeated Marion, blankly. She left the apples and stood up. "Oh, no, that's a mistake. He's going, but not gone. He goes by the 10:10 to-morrow."

"He went by the 10:10 to-day," said Walter. "Warner was at the station with the wagons for coal and saw him get into the London express. He tipped him half-a-crown, moreover; for bringing that last book to you, I guess."

Marion said: "Then he is doubtless coming

back." With an effort she constrained herself to finish her task; her instinct was to get away from Walter and fly to the note. Was it from Mr. John or Miss Frances? She would not ask. She told herself it did not matter; told herself that it was certain now that he would be coming back. Indeed, she believed this. It was incredible that he would leave without even saying good-bye.

When she went downstairs she constrained herself further to take off her coat and wash her hands before looking at the note lying on the hall table. One glance had shown her that it was from Miss Frances, which made her assure herself again that he was coming back. But she read:

MY DEAR MARY,

John is called to London to-day instead of to-morrow. He asks me to say how very sorry he is not to see you again. He will write to us from London.

I feel very old and lonely, dear. Come and cheer me up.

Marion said to herself, dropping the note: "I can't go. Oh, I can't go."

Walter came in. He asked, with lifted brow:

"Gone, hasn't he?"

"Oh, yes," said Marion. "I must hurry off after dinner. Miss Frances will be feeling very dull to-day."

She picked up the note and dropped it with the envelope into the fire. The sight of it, at least, should not again hurt her. The words danced before her in letters of fire.

"What is for dinner?" asked Walter.

She told him and related why she had had the fowl killed. It was a young pullet of a stolen brood and had taken to eating its eggs. All the time she was reading: "He will write to us from London." Her heart cried, "Why not say truthfully 'to me'? *I* was not in his thoughts."

Kate came in to lay the cloth for dinner.

IV

Coming back from Greyladies that evening Marion thought she knew quite definitely what her life would be. A thing made up of beginnings and loose ends; of vain imaginings and barren loves.

In some odd way she felt sunk in humiliation and self-contempt. To have squandered so much thought, so much emotion, so much downright suffering on an empty dream, a mere figment of her imagination! She assumed she would always be like that: following false lights, mistaking substances for shadows and shadows for substance; going through life thwarted, hungry, unsatisfied, and undesired.

This medley of passionate despair arose largely from what she had learnt of the very definite nature of John Preston's leave taking. As such Miss Frances had wisely and firmly represented it, hoping indeed that John would be as good as his word. She loved him—and loved Marion—too well to wish to see him again. She thought it best so and commended the cruel kindness of his farewell, though she realized it as almost inhumanly wise. Young people of her day, she thought, were less

sane and self-controlled. The men and women of this generation were strangers to her: surely their blood ran slow and pallid in their veins!

Marion, when she came, filled Miss Frances's chafed spirit with impatience. She came neat, quiet, smiling, wearing shoes with heels absurdly high for country walking. They were really quite moderate heels but Miss Frances was in a mood to find things wrong. A little dowdiness or dishevelment in Marion would to-day have suited her better. Instead, her bright hair crowned the girl's head with grace, her flush was as becoming and her smile as sweet as when John held the door for her to enter. As she took Miss Frances's hands and kissed her cheek she said, cheerily:

"It's only one day less."

"I know," said Miss Frances. "But I had no notion how much I should miss him; how used I had grown to keeping his room for him."

Marion sat down on the fender stool. She said:

"I wish my men were going. I could do with Margaret's Mead to myself for awhile."

Miss Frances saw that Marion had chosen her part; saw it as inevitable that to conceal deep feeling she would show none. She answered, with her eyes moist:

"Thank goodness old age wins one the privilege of tears. I haven't got to keep a curb on my affections."

Marion stroked her hands absently. She recognized that her friend's heart was sore.

"I really am very sorry, dear Miss Frances,"

she said. "But I'm not going to let you brood over it if I can help it. Tell me how he went? In good spirits I expect? When one has the wanderlust one must be glad to go."

"So we are to look upon it as a pleasure trip," observed Miss Frances, drily. Marion was faintly surprised at her unreasonable mood. She felt glad that she had to leave early; she was walking back and wished not to be too long after dusk. She thought to herself, oddly:

"Does she expect me to sit submerged in tears because her precious man's gone away? What tears did he shed at going?"

And she humoured Miss Frances with a sweet but faintly condescending kindness, as one unbends to the hopeless, helpless sorrow of a child.

V

By the time ten days had passed of the fourteen that remained for John Preston to stay in England, Marion passionately wished the time to go quickly. She found that until he had actually sailed the episode was not really closed for her: she could not and did not realize her outlook as fixed.

"He might find he had time," she would think—"he might have left early to make time—for a final farewell." He had not been gone three days before she hourly expected his return. But the day before his departure arrived and only one letter had been received by Miss Frances, containing a brief message for Marion of enquiry and farewell.

Marion got up that morning feeling that hope

was indeed gone. He would not come now: he would be busy with preparations for the morrow. Breakfast was a dreary meal and the morning dragged hopelessly. So hopelessly that at twelve o'clock she felt she could endure the life indoors no longer and started for a walk round the farm.

As she passed the yard Warner was taking his horses into stable. He hailed her, touching the brim of his old worn hat.

"I thought ee would like to know, Missie," he bawled, "that Mr. John be back at Greyladies for the day. I passed un in his motor driving from Minterne. He stopped I and said he wer'n't off to Africa till to-morrow. He leaves early in the morn."

The aspect of the world changed for Marion. She was glad she had to open and shut a gate and draw nearer before she could make heard her reply.

"It couldn't have been his motor, Warner. He has sold it. Perhaps it was a hired one from Minterne."

"Like enough, but he was driving hisself. No one with un. He looks as though a vyage'd do un good. Thought ee'd like to know, Miss. I heerd he wer'nt expected like at whoam."

"Thanks, Warner," said Marion. She felt this day was hers. She changed her mind about a walk and hurried back indoors. At any moment he might call.

VI

By three o'clock Marion was alternating feverishly between two opinions; one that he would walk

over to say good-bye, the other that Miss Frances would send a maid or one of the men to ask her to come to tea.

Or, perhaps, Mr. Preston himself would fetch her and she would hurry into her things and walk back with him in the thin sunshine through the leafless woods. Or would he come and she offer him tea with her—an early cup—in the oak room that she had slowly transformed to her liking? Would he approve it wholly now; be conscious of it as a pure pleasure, a thing of beauty unalloyed, or was there still something she had left undone? There must be a good fire in there—a log fire.

"Kate," she said aloud, wandering into the kitchen, "have you lit the oak-room fire yet?"

"Yes, Miss."

"Are there plenty of logs?"

"Yes, Miss. Logs and peat and coal."

"What have we for tea to-day? Could you make me a few of your small Scotch scones?"

"You make them best, Miss."

"Yes, I know. But I shouldn't to-day. I mean—I've so much mending. Make some, Kate. Early, please. I think perhaps I should like an early tea."

Kate stared at her. She said, slowly:

"By yourself, Miss? Neither Mr. Napier nor Mr. Will are likely to be in before half-past four."

Marion did not answer. She had no sane answer ready. But she went restlessly to the linen chest and put uppermost the daintiest tea-cloth she could find in case she should need to tell Kate to use it.

By half-past three she had worn expectancy thin, and fear, the chillest fear, assailed her. If he had not come by four, Will and Walter would be in for tea. She would not dare leave for Greyladies then; she could not face Walter's jeer. Then, too, by the time tea was over it would be five o'clock and toward dark. How could she pretend to call casually at a house two miles away at half-past five of a February day? And she could not, for very shame, go other than casually: she could not proclaim herself come to say good-bye if he had not thought to say good-bye to her. Again, to go after dark would oblige him to bring her back. She looked at the clock. It was too late already. If she went now she could not get back by half-past four. But would that matter? No. What more natural than that she should walk over to Greyladies this lovely mild winter afternoon.

She went out to Kate again, running out in seeming light-heartedness. And, indeed, resolve did something to disperse her gloom, replacing dreadful suspense with the excitement of action and breathless expectation. She said:

"I've changed my mind. I can't lose all this lovely day. Never mind about getting tea early and don't keep it about for me. I'm going for a long tramp. Phyllis will look after the children and pour out the tea."

Kate said, quickly: "I could have a cup ready for you, Miss, by the time you've got on your things."

Marion changed her first instinct of refusal to a

bright: "Thank you, Kate, then I'll have it out here," and flew upstairs to get ready.

When she came down a few minutes later the afternoon peace of the kitchen had vanished. Phyllis had brought the children in that way because Clare had got her boots so muddy. Bobbie was chattering, Clare clamouring to "go with Auntie May." Marion told her:

"I am going too far, darling," and Bobbie began with his absurd, wistful, "Take me."

She kissed and pacified them both, gave instructions to Phyllis, swallowed her cup of tea. Getting away through the garden she straightened her thoughts after the brief clamour, saying to herself:

"I must be mad! Why do I want to go?"

But she struck out for Greyladies at a sharp pace.

VII

There was much colour out and about this clear February day. Not alone the dark brightness of fir and pine thrown out against blue sky, or the drifts of red-brown leaves beneath the trees, or gloss of climbing evergreen and red and black of berry clusters among the brown of the leafless hedgerows. These were something, but not all. Marion saw the line of copse rising from the rich brown of the newly ploughed land as groupings of delicate and daring colour. There a patch of silver gray against a background of purple where slender trunks stood slim and straight in serried ranks; here

the gray toning off into a faint pale green next a group whose sap ran red and painted every feathery branch to its smallest twig a hue hovering between red and brown and purple. Never had the woods offered a richer feast of colour than was now austerely proffered; with the faintly insolent austerity of young maidenhood, all unaware that half its beauty lies in promise of a maturity it disdains.

The wood itself gave unexpected pleasure glimpses. Here catkins drooping in soft and graceful promise; there the thrill of primroses, purely pale against the moss or pushing up like delicate spears of green and yellow through the dead leaves. A fir tree had been felled; the scent of its resin reached Marion afar off and its stump glowed red in the dappled sunlight. She thought as she went:

"He loves all this. Why is he going? What in Africa will appeal to him like the quiet beauty of an English wood?" And again in rebellion she went over the fact that he should go now, in all the promise of spring and summer.

Nothing that she saw but added its quota to the sum of her suffering. Suffer she did, so intensely that she wondered again whether such pain could possibly go on, whether a period must not be put to it, perforce, as beyond the limits of human endurance.

Soon, none the less, she began to tell herself that she ought to be happy to-day; that at least she would see him, was now on her way to him. It was

the tea hour, so he would certainly be in. Of course, as she might have known, he would have his last tea with Miss Frances. They would be pleased to see her: Miss Frances would not count her an intruder and he—surely he would be pleased? His face would warm with a look of delightful expansion and pleasure; it would not to-day—surely not to-day—freeze and harden with the expression of inexplicable aloofness and restraint that more than once had shocked her.

With her thoughts running so, in an endless, feverish circle, she reached Greyladies.

Before she rang the bell she knew that he was out. As she passed the window she had caught a glimpse of the warm, firelit interior—Miss Frances in her low chair by the fire, her hands lying unwontedly empty in her lap; neither work nor book, it seemed, being in her thoughts. Tea was already cleared away; Marion knew this was so because, standing in the porch and scanning her mental picture, she saw the brass toast stand in the fender. This she knew was the last thing to be carried out as it was the last to be brought in.

Miss Frances rose with a little cry of pleasure to greet her, kissing her on both cheeks. Marion saw that she was flushed with excitement and that her thin, ringed hands were tremulous. Her first utterance told Marion all she feared to hear.

"I wish you had come earlier, darling. I wanted to send but John said 'no; if you heard he was here you would be sure to come unless you disliked farewells.' He seemed to think you might dislike

them. Of course, men do. And I admitted that you were bound to learn from Warner that he was here. But I wish I had sent."

"He is gone, then?" said Marion. Her heart was beating to such strange measure that she felt suffocating.

"He has gone out, yes. Not for good. Oh, no. Not until morning. He leaves at half-past nine."

"He has gone out now for the evening, then?" Marion persisted. She felt sick and very cold.

"Until eight, dear. Mr. Gower is calling then. He asked me if I would mind if he tramped round for an hour or so. I do rather grudge the hours, but I told him no. I think he feels going, rather, now the time has come." Miss Frances could not conceal that she was troubled and perplexed, as though she saw a John unfamiliar to her.

"I see," said Marion. "Yes, I thought I must just come to say good-bye."

Miss Frances murmured in the disturbed way so unlike her: "He has been here so much . . . we had such a lovely summer."

"And autumn," said Marion, ' and winter."

Miss Frances smiled; her sweet look cleared.

"Thank you, dear," she said. "We must hold fast to our memories. Those we have for our sure possessing."

Marion sat down. Through her own pain she saw, though numbly, that this old and frail friend needed solace and comfort, all and more than she could give. Something new and strange in Miss Frances's pain perplexed her. She wondered if the

mere will to give, without her heart in the effort, would be of any use. She said aloud:

"I may stay half an hour. I had tea before I left."

"I am just wondering, dear," said Miss Frances, with a return of her perplexed and troubled manner, "whether John had any thought of looking in at Margaret's Mead. He seemed to expect you at tea time—I expected you, too—and since he is tramping round he might tramp in that direction as well as any other."

Life flowed in Marion's veins again at the suggestion, even although she read into her friend's manner some doubt lest she should feel slighted at John's failure to make certain of a final farewell to her. She was wrong in her interpretation: Miss Frances's fear lay elsewhere. But it led her to reply, cheerfully:

"Perhaps so, and whether I go or stay I must risk missing him. Which shall it be, dear?"

Miss Frances answered, thoughtfully:

"He has not left the house long. He was not going straight to Margaret's Mead, I feel sure. You would be sorry to miss him?"

Marion gave a little laugh as she picked up her gloves.

"You mean I must march," she said, gaily. She embraced her friend with fond deliberateness. "What you really are afraid of is that I shall be benighted in the woods. See how the last crimson is fading from the sky?"

Final farewell remarks were uttered in the porch,

whence Miss Frances watched her through the gate and up the road in the fast-declining day.

VIII

As she walked home Marion counted the hours that remained during which it was at all possible that she could see John Preston. She made them less than three. It was now past five and at eight o'clock the Vicar would be awaiting him at Grey-ladies. Moreover, eight would be considered a late hour for calling in the country in mid-winter. Marion told herself that if he came he must come before half-past seven.

With the increasing tenuousness of her hope of seeing him her craving and her despair deepened. In the tumult of her emotions she had no time to ask what she hoped from seeing him; her sole consciousness was of impending loss: utter, imminent, desolating. Every moment this grew sharper, her expectation more lost and feverish, her heart more numb.

"It is the poorness of my possessions makes me suffer so," she thought, aghast at the ruin wrought in her. "If he knew it, would he sacrifice somewhat to lessen it?" Calm sense told her he would be merely amazed, confounded, incredulous.

She reached home.

She entered by the front door though she would have preferred the kitchen to interrogate Kate on her way. But she bethought herself that if he was in the house he would leave by the front door and the garden, and in those few moments she

might miss him. She heard Phyllis's voice and the children's. Then Kate came into the hall.

She asked: "Has anybody called, Kate?"

"No, Miss. Mr. Will has gone out and said he wouldn't be back to supper till ten. He's gone to a Temperance meeting in Minterne. Mr. Napier's in the dining room."

"Thank you, Kate." She passed on her way upstairs, praying that Walter would go out.

When she came down, however, she found that Clare and Bobbie were with him and he was patiently keeping them amused. He looked up as she entered and after a quick glance remarked, laconically:

"You've walked too far."

"Oh, no," Marion answered. "I've been to Greyladies." She knew he guessed it.

"Did you run down your quarry?"

"Did I what?"

"Did you find Preston in?"

"No," said Marion. His tone made her tremble. She found herself adding: "Miss Frances thought I should find him here."

"Sent to say good-bye," said Walter, in an ambiguous tone. "Kiddies' bedtime at six, isn't it?"

"Usually."

"Leave them to me, then. I m not going out till quarter past. There's an *Athenæum* in the oak room if you care to see it."

Marion wondered, "Does he think I'm ill?" She caught a glimpse of herself in the mirror as she turned away and knew at once that he did, so large

and hollow and unnaturally bright were the eyes that met hers, so exactly like Lottie's. She remembered that she had eaten nothing all day.

In the oak room she found Kate mending the fire. The room seemed to her very hot. Kate asked:

"Won't you have something to eat, Miss?"

"No, thank you, Kate." The thought of food was nauseating. "Ask Phyllis to get the children off sharp at six. I will come up when they're in bed."

Kate stared again; putting the children to bed was a task Marion rarely relinquished.

"No, don't light the lamp," Marion admonished. As soon as Kate had gone she began a restless, dreary pacing of the room.

She perceived that at the first sign of tiredness or flagging appetite the whole household imagined she was going to follow Lottie; she grimly thought this lucky, knowing her health was sound. Then her thoughts resumed their restless circling, while her glance strayed over to the darkening garden path.

She fancied that the sound of every movement in the house reached her. Phyllis came out of the kitchen, pausing to finish a conversation with her hand on the door. Marion heard it finally shut as she concluded. Then she claimed the children; after a brief parley their voices sounded in the hall, up the stairs, in the bedroom above. Walter went into the hall; his last act was to take his whip from the rack. Marion knew that he was driving—not far, or he would have had the car. Will pre-

sumably was cycling, his being the nearer distance. She heard the trap brought round and soon the last crunch of wheels and beat of hoofs upon the hard road as it was driven away. Out of doors the countryside was wrapped in a profound silence.

She went upstairs to kiss the children good-night. Less than an hour remained to her now! As she turned to come down a sharp ring of the door bell resounded through the house.

She listened at the stairhead, trembling with fear of disappointment. But the tones were unmistakable. She rested both hands on the balustrade as Kate ran up to announce, primly:

"Mr. Preston, Miss."

Her state of tension relaxed suddenly and completely. The floor seemed unsteady under her feet as she went downstairs.

IX

He stood by the fire. Kate had lit the lamp and was now drawing the curtains. Marion gave him a perfunctory greeting, longing for Kate to finish her task and go. When she did so and closed the door she found herself murmuring:

"I walked over to Greyladies this afternoon."

"Did you?" A curious quality in his voice made her raise her eyes for her first long look at him. He stood tall, well carried, well dressed, yet with an unusual look about him of strain, excitement, tension. But she saw little more than the man she must soon lose. So in a moment or two he added, quietly:

"To say good-bye to me?"

She echoed: "To say good-bye."

"You thought you would like to do that?" A gentle irony in his words sent her eyes to him again, hurt and shocked. He added:

"My one idea has been to avoid saying good-bye to you."

She forced a smile in her bewilderment and pain, meant to convey: "But you are here."

He answered the look.

"I came down to Greyladies to see you. For no other reason. Then I decided I must not seek to see you. And for the last two hours I have been trying not to come."

Marion repeated the words after him as though feeling for their meaning. A second self seemed whispering in her ears: "Collect yourself. Remember, he doesn't know that you are stupefied with pain."

When she had repeated them she heard him saying: "Is that so strange to you?"

She answered: "I don't understand."

"Surely then I must explain," he said. He was smiling at her strangely, his fine face ashen. She met his look. Her doubts fled.

On an irresistible impulse she told him:

"If you had succeeded, if you had not come, I don't think I could have lived."

Naturally, as it seemed to her, warmth and colour returned to his face. And, indeed, the words that were on his lips—passionate, hungry words—he checked, constraining himself to unbend to her idea

of him, in that moment instinctively perceived. So, naturally, in the manner familiar to her, he took her hands in his and, putting her into the old cosy settle, seated himself beside her.

"What, then, would have happened?" he asked. "Would you have braved the wood by night and I have been wakened by a tapping at the lattice, only to find a spirit haunted me and that you had left your mortal frame untenanted to find me? How would you be sure I should meet and know you in that land of dreams?" His voice changed. "Marion," he said, "I do not want your spirit only, though I want that, too. I have come to tell you that I want you in the body."

She looked at him with parted lips, her eyes shining, her breath coming fast.

"I so want you," he repeated, urgently, "that I could not tear myself away and leave unspoken the words that might win you. You hear me say I love you. Do you love me?"

He had lifted her out of the planes of calm reason. Her impulse was to give him the truth—bare as she saw it, with: "Dearly, more than my life." But every ideal and aspiration of her life joined forces to drive the answer back. Watching her eagerly he grasped at perception of the obstacle in his path.

"I love you," he repeated, glance and grasp gaining passion. "I begin to believe you love me. You will not tell me that you hold me married?"

The spell she had been under broke at the word, at his scorn that refuted it. She took her hands from his.

"No," she said. "Only the law holds you so. We have discussed the question often, veiled and disguised. It does not alter because it now becomes pertinent to me and you. And what does it matter? To-morrow you go away."

He took her hands again, his glance burning, and drew her very near to him.

"You love me," he said, undenied. "I came because I could not say good-bye. Then do you think I have come to say it? Love is not an abstraction. It has needs, living and urgent. You will come with me."

"To-morrow?" A gentle mockery found its way into her voice.

"To-morrow. It will be easy." Almost as he spoke he dovetailed his plans together—plans deliberately made to make this thing he now entreated for quite impossible. "I will call for you on my way to the station. You will be going into Minterne, shopping. You will never come back."

"Never come back," said Marion, as though she humoured him. A second self was clamouring for the moments to be prolonged; the moments in which he held her hands enclosed in his; held her so close to him that his breath stirred her hair and she almost heard his heartbeats. "Never come back—and leave everything I possess behind me?"

"Pack the things you want to-night. Leave them in the hedge near the gate. I will return at twelve and fetch them. The case, or box, what you will, will pass as mine. I am serious, Marion."

"I see you are, but you should not be. Do you

think for one moment I would consent to ruin your life?"

"Words!" he said. "Melodrama! Who will know in South Africa? They *do* know I am married. You will be my wife."

She drew a deep breath. If it were possible! His mind skimmed over many possibilities. It was but to burn his letters of introduction and forget them. To lie a little; manœuvre a little; fail to settle down to the work he went out to do. And so to move on. If Marion left a letter most probably the Napiers would prefer to hush it up. If not at the worst Robert might get his wife to divorce him. In any event, he would have Marion; they would be together. He repeated the fatuous sentence: "My wife."

Marion said: "You know it would not be so."

"Do you doubt my love for you, my care for you?"

She answered, "No."

"You believe I have fought this; that I am driven to it against my will? Because it is the only possible thing for us? Could you face separation? Can you face it now?"

Marion's sick heart answered "no" but the word did not reach her lips. The mingled pain and bliss of the moment swayed her between heights and depths. Her lover's voice urged her:

"So promise me."

"I cannot."

He looked at her searchingly. "You want to come?"

"I do not want to lose you."

"Unless you come, you must lose me." There was in the words a suspicion of the immaturity and crudity of the nature he appealed to. He seemed to see the possibility of Marion living in a different world from his. A suspicion not new to him; a possibility not seen now for the first time. He added to his words:

"You see that, don't you?"

"This last year," said Marion, with painful stops between her halting words, "I have been so happy. I thought it was just the beginning of happy and happier days."

"Child!" he cried, a wistful tenderness in the word. "Would that it could! But all this year, Marion, you have kept me starving. Will you decide now?"

"I cannot."

"Then, before ten, and I can still make our plans. I know I must give you time to think. You will think I am waiting. . . . And you will send to me. Any message, any sign—a book, a note—one word. You must send it. You must give in."

Suddenly Marion saw the truth. She uttered, surprising herself, as it were without volition of her own:

"I never shall."

He dropped her hands and took a short turn away from her. When he returned his face wore a new aspect, the look she loved most of all.

"I hope, for your sake, you will not," he said,

quietly. "How do I know that I could make you happy? I only know that you could make me so. And that instead I shall be very desolate."

Nothing he had said yet wooed her as did those words. Marion caught her breath. Not knowing what she did she laid her two hands on his arm. She said, in a laboured voice:

"It is too hard. Why must you go?"

His arms went round her. Never had he loved her beauty as he loved now her young tortured face. How easy to have answered so that he might live in her thoughts for ever, crowned king above all men. But he pressed on steadily to a goal that seemed suddenly long foreseen.

"Marion, say aloud that you love me. Give me your lips."

She did both, as though she had but waited for that urgent word. He held her with his lips pressed hotly and softly to hers. Her heart prayed that time might stand still. Yet in a few minutes she made a movement of withdrawal. Instantly she heard him saying:

"I have asked you for nothing that you ought not to give. Be glad I am going. If I had stayed I should have asked and you . . . would have given."

She drew a slow, tortured breath. She saw that he was forcing recognition on her. It was their last hour together out of an eternity of absence and he must spoil it! She answered, sharply:

"No."

"I should ask," he repeated. "You know that—

now—don't you?" She made no answer and he said again: "So be glad I am going."

He wrung out her reply: "I don't believe it."

He looked down into her eyes, his own burning.

"It is true of me," he said. "It is true. So there is no future for us here possible. You must believe that, or you will not forgive me for going. Would it not be true of you?" He no longer looked into her eyes, but said on a new note of urgency: "Let me believe it. It helps me to go. Please." He strove to strain her to him against her withdrawal.

She answered, hopelessly, "You must let me go now." As his arms fell from her she saw that his face had become white and anguished. She felt driven back to him and knew that she must not touch him. She moved away, murmuring:

"Good-bye."

He turned to her a pale and gentle look that forced smarting tears to her hot eyes. He took her hand so that she thought—she hoped—he would again draw her to him. But he released it with a pressure and his half-tender, half-humorous smile quivered momentarily on his lips as he returned her "good-bye."

She had forced him to say it. It was over and she left him. His last look—all gentleness, tenderness, pain—stayed with her. Yet there had been the other moments, not to be forgotten. She would forget them, utterly, she told herself, as they were utterly forgiven. Yet she clenched her hands; her breath hurried. Was this life, never adequate,

never complete; made up of cross purposes and loose ends? Not even this memory without alloy!

She muttered to herself, under her breath:

"Yet this is the best, quite the best man I know." And added, presently, with sudden dreary self-derision: "And this is me. And I love him!"

She had gained her room and knelt at the bedside. Presently she heard the creak of the garden gate on its hinges. She rose on an impulse and stepped quietly across her darkened room to the window. Was it he, and was he going or returning?

Yes, it was Mr. Preston. He had lingered, then, in the garden; on some new hope, or purpose, or regret. She watched him close the gate, pause again in the bright moonlight, and at last proceed with his fine swinging gait up the road. She noticed that he had lit a cigar.

The Inevitable Close

I

Marion had stood a long time at the window in the darkness before Kate knocked at the door. Against the dull background of her pain and loss the feverish emotions of the past hour stood out in her memory vivid and incredible. She felt her lover's touch, his kisses—his, so incredibly, so incredibly her lover—heard the varying intonations of his voice; its plea, its strong yet reluctant assertion. It seemed unthinkable that all this passion—so prized, so wonderful—could be hers for one half hour and then for ever banished.

Her eyes were dry and burning, her face hot, her mouth parched. Since he passed out of sight she had seen nothing of the moonlit winter scene stretched before her, nor had retained consciousness of the dark room behind. Then Kate knocked, and in a moment her brain became preternaturally alert. She flew to her dressing-table. Kate would think her mad to stay in the cold and dark!

With eager fingers she struck a match and lit both the candles before she called, "Come in."

Kate held a scrap of paper toward her: a leaf torn from a pocket book.

"Mr. Preston left this for you, Miss. I asked

him should I give it you at once, and he said any time within an hour. He would not let me call you down."

Marion took the paper but did not attempt to read it. She said:

"Then he came back?"

"Just as I was closing the door, Miss. He gave me the message first and then laughed and said I should forget the name 'Ouzmann's' or something."

There was no help for it, Kate's expectation was obvious; Marion read the message now. She had wished to keep it awhile, to feel that for yet a few minutes she held something of his in store.

The pencilled words ran:

Send "Ouzmann's" back to me by Warner if you decide to read it on the spot.

That was all, but Marion's hands shook as she read. "Ouzmann's" was a slender book on South Africa lent to her when he first talked of going there. His words came back to her—"any message, any sign—a book, a note—one word." And now "Send 'Ouzmann's' back to me if you decide to read it on the spot."

A movement of Kate's brought her back to the present. She looked up with an absent, "Thank you," and then added, "I am coming downstairs in a minute. Will you heat me a glass of milk, please?"

She put out the candles and went down and restlessly moved about the room until Kate brought

the milk, and again after. The note had wrought a strange revolution in her mood. With it in her hand John Preston's proposal became for the first time a real, tangible, practicable thing.

Hitherto it had been a wild suggestion, thrown out on the crest of a wave of emotion; now it was an earnest proposition, persisted in to the point of making the first step easy. She seemed to see the process of his reasoning and to know that he meant the note to reach her after a lapse of time, when its meaning would strike with force.

It was not over yet; decision was left to her. But her decision was made, as he knew. The note in her hand told her he did not know, did not believe. He still hoped. Could she fail him?

The very immaturity and inexperience that John Preston deprecated fought for him. Marion did not pause as an older woman might, to calculate the effect of her decision upon his view of her, nor to imagine in what new light fresh relations might give him to her. She believed with the infatuated blindness of youth that what they were now to each other they would for ever be. She had implicit faith in her love and her lover. But . . . .

She knew that what she had said to him held good. Nothing was altered. No action was right or wrong in itself—it became right or wrong only in relation to the circumstances surrounding it. It did not matter that to-night she was unable to see a clear issue, that right and wrong appeared inextricably tangled. To-night she was hardly sane; confused and bewildered with pain and

passion. The more reason that she should abide by conclusions arrived at when she was sane.

II

Warner, the under-carter who lived close to Greyladies, usually went home about nine o'clock after "racking up." He was brother to Kate, his late hour of leaving being largely brought about by the easy concession that if he chose to spend the dark evenings in the bright cosy kitchen with his sister and the daily paper he was welcome to do so. A further concession being that Kate should draw him a mug of cider and mull it if she would in the pointed warmer that nosed itself so cutely into the glowing cinders, and add thereto a generous supper of bread and cheese, it is small wonder that Warner could be counted on to "rack up" at half-past eight each night and start for home at nine with the regularity of clockwork.

Marion, of course, knew this well. She knew, too, that in giving his message first verbally to Kate, John Preston had ensured that Warner would not leave without enquiring whether Marion had a message for Greyladies.

Though so much had happened it was early yet —not more than half-past seven. The moon rode high in a clear sky; night silence encompassed the house about. The fire settled itself in the grate, grew gray, was stirred, revivified and replenished: its burning and settling, and the dropping of its ash, made the only sounds in the quiet room. Marion thought; her face set but her eyes burning

to the inward conflict. Fevered, wild, passionate longing—fear of suffering, fear of loneliness—held at grips by her sense of duty so long as power of choice remained.

Duty to whom? No soul lived to whom Marion owed duty, who had a right to claim it of her as a debt. Then to whom did she make sacrifice? For she was young in spirit—too young to know ungenerous though prudent fear.

If at that hour catchwords floated before her eyes; she turned from them in sick rejection. Sometimes she murmured to herself, "I can hold on." She looked out blindly. Honour, duty, morality—to play the game—to love one's neighbour—all were forms, words, shibboleths. Looking out she saw only a path on which she had set her feet. "I can hold on."

At last Kate came to the door. She asked, as Marion expected:

"Is there a message for Greyladies, Miss?"

Marion held the book in her hands, but, with her back to the door, she looked before her with burning eyes. She said:

"None, thank you, Kate."

Her voice was quite inaudible. Kate therefore waited. After a moment, finding the door remained open, Marion turned in surprise. Then she said again, quickly,

"None, thank you. I answered before."

Kate went out, quietly closing the door. Marion listened, tensely, for the sound of Warner's departure. After a brief interval she heard his foot-

steps and familiar whistle. She dropped "Ouzmann's" and fell to twisting a handkerchief convulsively in her hands. It was suddenly sundered into two halves, one part held in each hand with jagged centre depending, which, after staring at, she dropped. Unconsciously she began to utter half-words and little incoherent cries.

III

If Marion had permitted herself debate, it is unlikely that revulsion of feeling would have set in quite as it did. But since she had refused to contemplate a possibility, the possibility revenged itself by assuming the guise of accomplished fact.

Within fifteen minutes of Warner's departure she suddenly stilled her feverish movements and frenzied ejaculations. She stood quite still and motionless, the blood draining from her cheeks.

She thought, as though aloud, with amazing clearness and distinctness:

"I was mad. It is not too late. I can be at Greyladies before ten. I will take 'Ouzmann's' myself."

Without pausing, she went upstairs and put on her outdoor things. Without pausing, and very quietly and swiftly, she let herself out at the hall-door. Even by moonlight she disliked long, lonely country walks at night, but now she put all thought of strangeness from her. She was very sure and resolute, and she must make haste. She must, or at least she hoped to, get back to Margaret's Mead before Will or Walter; though it would not

matter if they knew she had been out; why should it? But nevertheless she must make haste.

She did hasten; her thoughts hastened more. Miss Frances's staid maid would answer her ring; and she would say—what should she say when she gave her the book?

She pondered that feverishly, but soon got her formula ready.

"Will you please give that to Mr. Preston at once? He wants to pack it. I must not stay—Mr. Napier is waiting for me."

That would not be wholly untrue. If either of the Napiers had reached home they *would* be waiting for her. Besides, a lie like that—what mattered one lie, more or less? Only lies that injured people really mattered. Of course, that was a sophistry. All lies matter. Only truth. . . .

She put her hands to her ears, exasperated, as though she listened to the needless argument. She reminded herself. "Of course I know all that. Why labour it now?"

She did not take the road through the wood, but by the hard white highroad. What a joke if she should pass Walter or Will! She would linger by the tall, shadowy hedge if she saw bicycle or vehicle, and they would pass by, thinking her a couple. Now she turned off the highroad. Not far, now, to Greyladies.

She had gained the shadow of the trees fringing the garden. The white gate gleamed ahead. Then suddenly her heart leapt. She passed by the gate and walked, very quietly, on by the side of the house.

Yes, her sudden fear was verified. The kitchen quarters were in darkness. The maids had gone to bed.

Standing very still in the shadow of the house she asked herself, "Who, then, will answer if I ring? Mr. John—Miss Frances?"

She saw either alternative as impossible. Was she to hand the book, the sign of her surrender, to her lover—murmur her impossible, incoherent explanation of her presence, and leave him standing to watch her down the path from the door? Would she dare—could she dare face the impression he might make on her as he took it?

Standing mute and motionless by the house wall she knew it was impossible. Nor less impossible that she should essay a lying explanation if Miss Frances opened the door.

Suddenly she bethought herself of the letter-box. She looked at the book. Would it go in? Turning it over, she thought it might. Only it must reach Mr. John before ten! She could thrust it in, give the bell a long pull, and fly. He would think it was Warner, late.

She stole to the gate. She was unnerved now, with the thoroughness of strung nerves breaking to the unforeseen and unexpected. She hated and feared the crunching of her steps on the gravel of the path. The light was gone from the hall, which was good, for whoever answered the bell would pause to bring a light and so give her time to get away. Just a streak down one side of the curtained windows showed that somebody was still about downstairs.

She reached the door and tried the letter-box. The book would not go in—it was nowhere near small enough. Again Marion stood still—quite motionless. She thought—the hot blood surging in her ears. After a moment, quite deliberately and very quietly, she turned away.

She walked back toward Margaret's Mead at a sharp pace. When she was more than half way a clear thought struck across the passion and tumult of her breast. She stood still a moment as though to listen to it, then again pressed resolutely on.

"You could have torn out the title-page," said the clear voice of after-thought in her ear, "and folded it into a note. If Miss Frances picked it up she would be certain to comment on it, or he to enquire. He said 'any sign; one word.'"

Marion silently answered the torturing voice. "It is too late. I am no longer sure. It is after ten."

The voice answered: "What a lover, to leave the last step to you! And you—so weak, and such a bungler!"

Marion's lips twisted into an awful, self-contemptuous smile. She hurried, sometimes stumbling. As she entered the house the clock in the hall struck the half hour past ten. At the same moment she caught the first sound of Walter's returning wheels.

IV

Before Walter entered the house Marion had time to ascertain that Will had not returned and to

take her candle and go upstairs. She was not sure whether Kate or Phyllis had noticed her absence, nor did she care. She had bade them a listless good-night; told Phyllis it was past her bed-time, and now as listlessly gazed on the sleeping children before finally seeking her own room.

Entering, she thought heavily, "I am tired," but she made no movement to undress. Instead she drew back the curtains from her window and looked out into the night. She told herself "It is all over," and recalled how—not three hours ago—she had watched John Preston walk away and noted that he had lit a cigar. Undesired, a thought jeered at her: a mocking, self-derisive thought that she would fain have slaughtered, and could not. It told her that not morals, nor ethics, nor principles had availed her in her strait; she had abandoned all. Accident had decided the course she should pursue. The second accident was that the servants at Greyladies had gone to bed early; but the first that John Preston had lit a cigar.

More than once, in her long walk home, the remembrance of words and looks in their brief interview had almost sent her back to risk meeting Miss Frances—to hope that she would not see her, but instead that Mr. John would open the door and she would see again in his eyes the glow of exquisite tenderness that had accompanied his avowal. She thought of his pain and her power to dispel it: the new man—so new, yet familiar as dear—that the evening had given her. Why should she fear to give him what he asked—doubt

his reception of what he had pleaded for? And then, as a hand draws a sponge across a slate, these memories were wiped out. For answer she saw clearly a man self-reliant, confident, composed, casually but carefully lighting a cigar.

What was it that it should weigh with her? She knew that John Preston would do that, subconsciously, unwittingly, by sheer force of habit. Was he the man to be reduced to a pitiable image of weak despair, a slinking craven? Ah, she knew all that, yet it had its weight. It reminded her that life was long and passion short. That passionate moments were but the episodes and commonplace the tale. That for one hour when John Preston would be her lover there must be hundreds when he would be the man of the world.

It was hard to define and express, yet Marion recognized a truth. In loneliness and darkness to be his and his alone—that were good. But all day, in the hard brightness of daylight, in the world of men; at work or at leisure, in the public eye—would he be hers then? Would love weave them bonds or shackles?

She said aloud: "Were he but free!"

Her thoughts pressed on. Sometimes it was her torture that accident alone had had power to keep her from him; sometimes it was her joy. The day was to dawn when she saw it as no accident, but as the inevitable result of what she had chosen to become. Had she been different such accidents would not have turned her from her course, and that they did so was no more accidental than her

impulsive yielding. But to-night she pursued other paths. Soon she burned to the knowledge that indeed she desired him—desired him with no mere girlish idealization, but from a womanhood suddenly realized, refined, mature. Desired him wholly, entirely, altogether.

She said to herself in despair:

"Some day, when he has been long gone, when I believe he has forgotten, I shall yield to a lesser love, and marry."

She shivered to a sick horror of the thought until the vision faded. With sudden, dreary prevision, she smiled.

"Not so," she answered the silent accusation. "I shall remember, and go starving to my grave."

V

Miss Frances had hardly parted from Marion before she regretted letting her go. Why had she not kept her on the chance of John returning? Better far that they should meet under her eye at Greyladies.

For by now whatever uncertainty she might feel in regard to Marion, she felt none in regard to John. Why should he leave like that—abruptly, inconveniently, inexplicably—and why return? Miss Frances knew that warm affection for aged aunts does not lead men to rush across England for the sake of an hour or two with them after a deliberately taken farewell. John had been at Liverpool with his father only the day before. And if he came for Marion—to what end?

His return caused her painful trouble and excitement. On the one hand, all her sympathies were with him; on the other, she knew life well. All the manœuvres, the deceits, the hypocrisies, that are the inevitable degrading attendants upon illicit love—however blameless—she knew well. Under their constant infliction sensibilities become blunt; a certain distortion or perversion of morals becomes necessary to self-preservation. At the best a conscious distortion; at the worst a perversion unperceived.

All day, ever since she saw her nephew striding past her window, she had asked herself: Will they meet? If so, what will be said, what done? She had earnestly wished to send for Marion and had regarded it as of the illest omen that John should wish her coming left to chance. A quiet tea-hour; what could have happened amiss? And yet—and yet—somehow she wished that they might have their hour!

She had sent Marion away in a moment of yielding to her knowledge of how hungrily she, in her youth, would have desired that hour. Almost at once she wished her back, in a tumult of fear lest it should mar, rather than make, her peace. And then the slow hours of John's absence stole by. It was six, seven, eight. On the stroke of eight he came in with Mr. Gower, just as had been arranged, for an informal dinner.

The Vicar had chanced upon him in the morning and eagerly claimed his interest for a nephew going out to South Africa in a few months' time. Miss

Frances, watching anxiously, saw him his courteous and serious best for the old man's benefit. But soon she fancied a constant subtle suggestion of listening behind his quiet talk. The door bell rang half way through dinner and instantly Miss Frances knew that she was right. He expected something or someone. She longed to ask, "Have you seen Marion?" but her very anxiety sealed her lips.

It was half-past nine before Mr. Gower offered to go, and by that time Miss Frances felt that John's expectation had reached its height; his preoccupation with the sounds outside had become marked; his attention to his guest hard to maintain. Whom was he expecting? Not Marion, at this hour. A messenger, a message. Miss Frances's intuitions stopped little short of the truth.

The Vicar was older than Miss Frances and far more feeble and bent. When he rose to go John rose, as usual, to go home with him. Protesting, Mr. Gower leant thankfully on his arm. It was a short walk to the Vicarage; John was not gone long. But when he returned Miss Frances saw that the look of strained expectation had faded, leaving a sombre, spiritless dejection. And now she feared to frame her question, "Have you seen Marion?" but did so in spite of fear.

He answered: "Yes. I called and said good-bye to her. She told me she came over while I was out." With an evident effort he went on to regret that he had not returned earlier. "I believe I have done you more harm than good by coming," he said. "You look tired out."

Miss Frances admitted being rather tired and yielded to his insistence that she should go early to bed. She knew all there was to know, and felt heavy at heart. She pieced her knowledge together as she went upstairs.

John had seen Marion: they had said good-bye. Yet all the evening he had expected a message. At half-past nine, when he went out with Mr. Gower, he still expected it. When he returned he expected it no more.

With a woman's acuteness she made her deductions. If between leaving for the Vicarage and returning his expectation was banished, one of two things must have happened. Either the messenger was intercepted or a time limit had expired. Miss Frances suspected the former. Warner's cottage lay between Greyladies and the Vicarage, and Warner was a constant go-between from Greyladies to Margaret's Mead.

The final deduction was easy to make. A message could only be so eagerly and anxiously awaited from a lover; neither coldness nor mere friendliness has such response to make. John had asked something which was only now finally denied. Until his return he had the look of hoping against hope. Now hope was dead.

Miss Frances paused by the landing window over the sunken porch and stood looking sadly out into the moonlit night. How like Marion to mingle with her love the cold of rectitude and strength of refusal. Or was that strength weakness—was it ignorance, fear, mere conventionality? At any

rate, it was not hardness or insensibility, or mere flat indifference; on no such foundation could John have built hope. Suddenly Miss Frances's view of her favourite lost its tinge of jealous criticism. With a sharp pang of self-reproach she thought: "How she will suffer!"

A swift rush of tears blinded her. In the next moment, brushing them aside, she saw a shadow pass the gate. Gazing intently and straining her ears to listen she fancied she heard light, lingering footsteps on the road. Then she caught her breath. Someone opened the garden gate and ventured up the path. It was Marion. Instinctively Miss Frances shrank back into the shadow.

Was it an appointment? Would John go out? Miss Frances chid herself for the thought. Never would he have asked Marion to come to him alone at night. And again she jumped at a conclusion. Her heart beat thick. Momently she expected the ring of the bell.

But instead she saw the small drama play itself out: heard the click of the letter-box, saw Marion retreat; saw that she still carried her small packet in her hand. John evidently had heard nothing. Miss Frances remembered that he was no longer expectant, and that in the drawing room heavy curtains and shutters deadened sounds from without.

But while Marion was in the porch she bethought herself that she ought to rush and open the door. But would that be desired? Doubt and dismay and cold fear deterred her. But at last—at last—as Marion unfastened and refastened the gate, the

drawing-room door opened and John stepped out into the hall.

She thought, in a panic: "He heard and will follow and see her clearly in the moonlit road. What must I do?"

She called out quickly: "John!"

She fancied she could hear his start. He answered, hurriedly drawing a bolt:

"Is that you, Aunt? Do you want me?"

"Just for one moment."

He left the door and came upstairs two at a time. He paused arrested as he found her at the window clinging to the heavy curtain.

He said, pantingly: "What is the matter?"

"I have been standing here," she answered, painfully, "and suddenly I stumbled. Did you hear me?"

He replied, dully: "I thought I heard steps outside."

She shook her head.

"No. I should have seen as well as heard. I'm sorry I disturbed you."

He asked in the same level flat tone: "Are you faint or hurt?" When she said "No" he added: "I will get you some brandy."

He saw her to her room and hurried downstairs. Miss Frances knew as well as if he had told her that he meant to assure himself that the road was clear. She heard him hasten to a downstair passage window that gave it to him from end to end and fling it open. She murmured to herself, "Too late." She heard the window closed and fastened and his

lagging steps below. The hall clock struck the hour of ten.

When he had brought her the brandy and lingered, talking kindly, and had made up her fire and sought for anything else that he could do, and, at last, left her, Miss Frances felt as though her heart would break.

Had she played traitor to the two she loved best on earth? Had she done right? Why—oh, why—had decision been given at last to her?

She put out her light and essayed to kneel by her bedside, feeling suddenly very old and frail. Her feet stumbled, shuffling, amongst the mats. Clasping her hands—the thin, pathetic hands of age—she sought among her trembling thoughts for prayer.

"Oh, God," she prayed, "forgive me if I have done wrong." She paused, her eyes streaming, and rejected many forms. "Oh, God, count it to them for good." Suddenly, with energy, possibilities pressing upon her—the warmth of love fulfilled, the cold of love denied—she laid desperate hands upon eternal right.

"Bless them; and let them be blessed. Sure of Thy help; confident in good."

The last two phrases she repeated tensely, with varying emphasis, many times.

VI

All night long John Preston fought despair—remorseful despair for what in the past day he had, after all, chosen to do.

Always he saw Marion's face of reluctant awakening. What had the vision meant to her that he had spoilt? If he could give it back to her would it be solace, comfort, hope? What solace was it to walk awake with truth?

So through the long night, regretting, desiring, repenting. Hating himself for destroying; hating fiercely what he had destroyed. And craving, craving above all to know that Marion still held him warmly in her pure regard.

He wrote to her—wrote many letters, and burnt them one after the other as containing hardly a grain of truth. Who that is aware of the medley of motives, the cross-currents of passion, the changing desires of the human breast ever sought self-expression without despair? He wished to give himself to Marion truly, lest the mere fact of loving him should do her too much hurt. How could he trust to her interpretation who failed so utterly to interpret himself?

Only with the break of day did he give it up, stirring with his foot the heap of ashes that represented his night's work and feeling in his veins a riot of desperate impatience at his own impotence. He imaged Marion waking to absence and silence, drawing round her the cold robes of duty and sacrifice, or moaning over young illusion dead.

The familiar house struck him strangely as he went downstairs. He realized that the stress of the past day and night was rendering the world to him anew. Miss Frances was smiling at him from

her accustomed place. He saw that an unstamped letter lay beside his plate.

His aunt said, cheerfully: "A note from Marion."

He walked with it to the window to see what the weather might be. Miss Frances busied herself with the cups. He read:

I love you, but I cannot come.

Seven words—he counted them curiously—and somehow they laid his spectres of doubt. He turned back to the fire and carefully dropped the note into it. As he took his place at the table he said to his aunt:

"I must leave a line for Marion in return for hers."

Compared with the night the morning seemed happy. When the pretence of a meal was over he went to the desk.

The very simplicity of Marion's message seemed to strike him dumb. But he wrote at last:

I spent all night in the vain attempt to do what you have done. If not happiness, then heartsease.

As he folded it, it struck him how facile it sounded; like the rounding off of a comedy. The day itself seemed light and gay—sunshine, colour, clear crisp air.

When he stepped into the car he knew that he left a chapter of life closed behind him. One chapter. The next, for all the false cheer of hope-

ful words, stretched before him barren and drear as to the outcast stretches a storm-swept winter day.

He was driving himself to the station. As Marion had surmised the car was hired and its owner awaited him there. He had made the unusual arrangement with a hope that was almost a fear. Which of us knows our own heart's desire?

So, choosing his spot, he drew up the car on the way and got out. He walked to a gate and leant over it, looking for silent moments toward a long low house with smoke curling up from twisted chimney stacks against leafless trees. This picture he carried with him afar.

He had chosen the wide gap in the hedge made by the paddock gate, where Lottie had grasped her sister's hand to say:

"Now, Marion. Margaret's Mead."

THE END

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